



PRESENTED BY **Qualcomm**

FIRST® RISESM powered by Star Wars: Force for Change
2019-2020 *FIRST®* Tech Challenge

Mentor Manual



Sponsor Thank You

Thank you to our generous sponsors for your continued support of the *FIRST*® Tech Challenge!

***FIRST*® Tech Challenge
Season Presenting Sponsor**

Qualcomm

***FIRST*® Tech Challenge
Official Program Sponsor**



Collins Aerospace

***FIRST*® Tech Challenge
Official 3D Augmented Reality/
Virtual Reality Sponsor**



Revision History

Revision	Date	Description
1	8/14/19	Initial Release

Contents

Contents	3
Introduction	7
How to Use This Manual	7
What is FIRST® Tech Challenge?	7
FIRST Core Values	7
Gracious Professionalism®	7
FIRST Tech Challenge Glossary	7
Season Timeline	9
The Mentor Role	10
What is a Mentor?	10
A Mentor	10
A Mentor's Role Includes	10
The Teacher Mentor	11
The Mentor as a Facilitator	11
Advice for Mentors	11
Mentor Time Management	12
Effective Mentor Time Management	12
Registering the Team	12
Registration	12
Purchasing Robot Supplies	13
Registering for Events	13
Team Identity and Spirit	13
Team Overview	14
Team Size	14
Age Range	14
Time Commitment	14
Finding Team Members	15
Suggestions for Recruiting Students	15
Selection Criteria	15
Finding Team Mentors	16
Recruiting Mentors	16

Gracious Professionalism® - "Doing your best work while treating others with respect and kindness - It's what makes FIRST, first."

Recruiting New Technical Mentors	17
Recruiting New Non-Technical Mentors	17
Team Meetings	18
Meetings.....	18
General Guidelines for Effective Meetings.....	18
Setting Expectations.....	19
Working Together.....	19
Building Robots.....	20
Safety for <i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge.....	20
Supervision	20
Apparel.....	20
The Workspace.....	20
General Safety Practices.....	21
Kit of Parts	21
Developing Strategy.....	23
Brainstorming	23
Effective Brainstorming for <i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge.....	23
<i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge Basic Bot Guide	24
Designing a Robot.....	24
What.....	24
How	24
Robot Drive Train Design	24
Robot Mechanism Design	25
3-D Modeling Software	25
Prototyping.....	26
Building.....	26
Modifying Parts	27
General Building Best Practices.....	27
Wiring	28
Programming.....	28
Software.....	28
Programming	29
General Programming Best Practices for <i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge	29
Iteration.....	30
The Engineering Notebook.....	30
Outreach Activities for Teams	30

Community Outreach	30
Using the <i>FIRST</i> and <i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge Logos.....	31
Advantages to Outreach.....	32
Navigating the Competition Season	32
Preparing the Team	32
Game Challenge and Rules	32
Drive Team	32
Pit Crew	33
<i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge Tournament Structure	33
Types of <i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge Events.....	33
Tournament Registration	34
Finding Tournaments.....	34
The Event Registration Process.....	34
What to Expect.....	35
Tournament Logistics	35
Tournament Areas.....	35
What to Expect at an Event.....	36
General Guidelines for Tournaments	36
Supervision and Safety.....	38
Inspections	39
Robot Inspection.....	39
Field Inspection.....	39
Queuing and Matches.....	39
Game Play.....	39
Autonomous Stage.....	40
Driver-Controlled Stage.....	40
End Game Stage	40
Scoring	40
Question Box Etiquette.....	41
Calculating Ranking.....	41
Alliance Strategy and Scouting	42
How to Get Noticed by Alliance Scouts	42
How to Select an Alliance Partner.....	42
<i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge Judging and Awards.....	42
Why Judging Interviews?	42
How Judging Works	43
Preparing and Practicing.....	43

The Elevator Speech	44
Dean's List Award.....	44
<i>FIRST</i> Alumni and Scholarship Program	44
<i>FIRST</i> Alumni	44
<i>FIRST</i> Scholarship Program	45
<i>FIRST</i> Internship Portal and Alumni Network	45
Celebration and Recognition	45
Celebrating the End of the <i>FIRST</i> Tech Season	45
Recognize Team Members.....	45
Recognize Seniors and Outgoing Members.....	46
Recognize Sponsors, Mentors, and Volunteers	46
Host a Local Event	46
Maintaining Team Longevity and Sustainability	47
Why Longevity and Sustainability?	47
Goal-Setting and Self-Assessment.....	47
Appendix A – Resources	48
Game Forum Q&A	48
<i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge Game Manuals.....	48
<i>FIRST</i> Headquarters Pre-Event Support.....	48
<i>FIRST</i> Websites	48
<i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge Social Media.....	48
Feedback.....	48
Appendix B: Season Planning Tool.....	49
Appendix C: Sample Team Roster	51
Appendix D: <i>FIRST</i> ® Tech Challenge Sample Budget	52
Ways to Reduce Expenses for Rookies	52
Ways to Reduce Expenses for Veterans	52
Optional Costs.....	52
Appendix E: <i>FIRST</i> ® Tech Challenge Team Roles	53
Appendix F: Types of <i>FIRST</i> ® Tech Challenge Events.....	59
Unofficial or Endorsed Events.....	59
Official Events	59
Event Descriptions	60
Appendix G: <i>FIRST</i> and <i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge Promotional Materials.....	62
Hand-Outs	62
Media and Press Tools	62

Presentation Materials	62
------------------------------	----

Introduction

How to Use This Manual

This manual is a resource for new and experienced mentors. This manual is full of resources that should help coaches and mentors throughout the season and help answer questions and provide insights to enhance your experience as a mentor. It is essential that you also read [Game Manual Part 1](#), [Game Manual Part 2](#), and the [FIRST Tech Challenge Forum](#) to keep up-to-date with information about the current season; if this document is ever in conflict with those resources, the rules and regulations in those documents supersede the information provided here.

What is FIRST® Tech Challenge?

FIRST® Tech Challenge is a student-centered program that focuses on giving students a unique and stimulating experience. Each year, teams engage in a new game where they design, build, test, and program autonomous and driver operated robots that must perform a series of tasks. To learn more about FIRST® Tech Challenge and other FIRST® Programs, visit www.firstinspires.org.

FIRST Core Values

We express the FIRST® philosophies of *Gracious Professionalism®* and *Coopertition®* through our Core Values:

- **Discovery:** *We explore new skills and ideas.*
- **Innovation:** *We use creativity and persistence to solve problems.*
- **Impact:** *We apply what we learn to improve our world.*
- **Inclusion:** *We respect each other and embrace our differences.*
- **Teamwork:** *We are stronger when we work together.*
- **Fun:** *We enjoy and celebrate what we do!*

Gracious Professionalism®

FIRST® uses this term to describe our programs' intent.

Gracious Professionalism® is a way of doing things that encourages high-quality work, emphasizes the value of others, and respects individuals and the community.

Watch Dr. Woodie Flowers explain *Gracious Professionalism* in this [short video](#).

FIRST Tech Challenge Glossary

As with learning anything new, part of the learning curve is learning the “lingo”. Below are some important FIRST Tech Challenge terms that you will encounter in this manual:

Affiliate Partner – coordinates the event structure, team recruitment and support, and funding for the FIRST Tech Challenge program in their region.

Awards – all teams participate in Judging Interviews that the Judges use to determine the winners of FIRST Tech Challenge Awards. Read more in the [Awards section](#) of this manual or on the program [Awards webpage](#).

Gracious Professionalism® - “Doing your best work while treating others with respect and kindness - It's what makes FIRST, first.”

Coach – anyone assisting the team who is not a student team member and works to help the team achieve their goals. Each team must have two adult screened coach/mentors. Coach and mentor are used interchangeably.

Competition Season – teams compete against other teams in tournaments. Tournaments start as early as October in some regions and conclude in the *FIRST* Tech Challenge World Championships in April. Read more about the [season timeline](#) and our events on the [Events webpage](#).

Coopertition – means that teams support and help one another even as they compete to the best of their ability. Read more on the [FIRST webpage](#).

Engineering Notebook – Teams document their experience both as a team and with the robot and assemble everything together in a notebook which they share with Judges. Read more and see examples in the [Engineering Notebook section](#).

Events – *FIRST* Tech Challenge events can happen anytime during the year. These include informal workshops and trainings, scrimmages, or tournament events. Read more about the [FIRST Tech Challenge Events](#) or visit the [Events webpage](#).

Game Challenge – in September at Kickoff, *FIRST* Tech Challenge announces the annual challenge in which teams will compete with their robots. Information on the game is published in the Game Manual Part 2 released at/during Kickoff.



Water Game – an ongoing joke around *FIRST* Tech Challenge and *FIRST* programs just before the Game is revealed.

Game Design Committee (GDC) – Volunteers donate thousands of collective hours to *FIRST* Tech Challenge and who design the annual game challenge, write the game manuals, and moderate the *FIRST* Tech Challenge forum.

Game Manual Part 1 and 2 – read them, know them, love them. They outline everything teams need to know about building the robot, the game challenge, engineering notebook, judging/awards, etc. They are published on the [FIRST Tech Challenge Game webpage](#) – Part 1 is released in July and Part 2 is released on Kickoff.

Gracious Professionalism® – means that teams support and help one another even as they compete to the best of their ability. Read more in the [Gracious Professionalism®](#) section or on the [FIRST webpage](#).

[FIRST Tech Challenge Forum](#) – Teams and mentors connect to ask questions and read answers about the annual game challenge and/or participate in information sharing.

Kickoff – the *FIRST* Tech Challenge season commences in early September with the annual Kickoff. Many regions host Kickoff events. The *FIRST* Tech Challenge program releases the Game Manual Part 2 and all information about the game challenge on Kickoff day via the [Game Page](#).

Kit of Parts – materials teams can purchase to use in building their robots, the Android phones, sensors, and modules. Read more on the [Registration and Costs webpage](#). Read more in the [Purchasing Robot Supplies section](#).

Mentor – anyone assisting the team who is not a student team member and who works to help the team achieve their goals. Each team must have two adults who are screened coaches/mentors. Coach and mentor are used interchangeably.

Team – a group of no more than 15 students (grades 7-12) who come together to form a team, design, build, and compete with a robot in the annual *FIRST* Tech Challenge game challenge. Read more in the [Building the Team section](#).

Team Registration – an online platform where mentors create a profile and complete background screening, setup the team's account, order kits, complete payment, and manage team information. Housed on the dashboard when you log into www.firstinspires.org.

Tournament – teams compete against other teams in tournaments. *FIRST* Tech Challenge tournaments start as early as October in some regions and wrap up in the *FIRST* Tech Challenge World Championships in April. (Event seasons vary by region, but always start with the Kickoff in September.

Volunteer Roles – all of *FIRST* relies on volunteers throughout the season. Both mentors and event volunteers are critical to the program's success. Read more on the [FIRST Tech Challenge Volunteer Resources webpage](#).



Youth Registration – an online platform where parents/guardians can complete registration information for their student. Housed on the dashboard when you log into www.firstinspires.org. Check out the [Youth Team Member System Overview webpage](#).

Season Timeline

The *FIRST* Tech Challenge is a year-long program, starting with Registration in May and ending with the *FIRST* Tech Challenge World Championships in April. The competition season varies from region to region, but it can start as early as October and run through April for teams that advance. The following chart details the different aspects of the season and when they happen:

	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.
Registration Opens												
Pre-Season												
Kickoff												
Build and Practice Season												
Qualifying Season												
State/Regional Championships												
World Championships												

Be sure to refer to the [Season Planning Tool in Appendix B](#).

For more information, refer to the [FIRST Tech Challenge Season Timeline webpage](#).

The Mentor Role

What is a Mentor?

Mentoring is an important part of the *FIRST* program and largely contributes to the program's success. Every adult on a *FIRST* team is a mentor, simply because he or she leads through guidance and example. It is important to remember students need guidance, structure, encouragement, and most of all, a fun experience!

When done correctly, this learning process builds and expands team members' self-confidence and knowledge. If the process has a strong foundation and works properly, adult team members come away with as much as students do.



Each Team must have at least two mentors who are 18 years old or older.

A Mentor...

- Requires no special skills, but should have patience, dedication, and a willingness to learn alongside the team.
- Is any person who works with the team in their area of expertise, for as little as one team meeting or as many as all of them.
- Helps provide valuable support and serves as a resource in their own area of specialty.
- Directs the process the team follows to solve the yearly game challenge, without providing the solution themselves.
- Is a coach, teacher, motivator, and facilitator.

In *FIRST* Tech Challenge, it is important that mentors and students are equal and that the relationship is a partnership. Each person works collaboratively towards a mutual and beneficial goal. To succeed, all the mentors and team members must commit to this.

Mentors should also be willing to acquire some basic knowledge of programming and robot building. Many teams enlist the support of a technology teacher or technical mentor for additional assistance. *FIRST* strongly encourages teams to invite people with backgrounds in engineering and programming to share their knowledge and experience.

A Mentor's Role Includes...

- Inspiring students in science and technology.
- Actively sharing knowledge and experience with the teams to help foster intellectual growth.
- Motivating and engaging students in meaningful activities.
- Balancing effective work habits with FUN!
- Allowing students to do as much of the work as possible.
- Encouraging the team to welcome and include all members.
- Providing students with opportunities to make choices, both good and bad.
- Encouraging students to take risks and be inventive.
- Allowing and encouraging independent thought.



For Mentors teaching *FIRST* Tech Challenge, the spectrum of involvement of the Mentor may be based on the structure of the course.

- Creating, encouraging, and facilitating open, honest communication within the team.
- Fostering a reciprocal environment of trust and respect for every member and their ideas.
- Encouraging accountability within the team.
- Facilitating team activities and discussion.
- Developing roles within the team.
- Coordinating help.
- Maintaining equipment and purchasing supplies.
- Communicating with sponsor organizations.
- Registering for competition(s).
- Planning and scheduling meetings, visits, and trips.
- Acting as a liaison between team members, mentors, parents, and volunteers.
- Informing students and parents about what is expected of them in terms of their commitment to the team each step of the way.
- Being a champion for Gracious Professionalism and role modeling the principle within the team.



The Teacher Mentor

Many of our *FIRST* Tech Challenge Mentors are also classroom teachers. Some teach *FIRST* Tech Challenge in their robotics class, while others coach the program as an after-school club, and still others fall somewhere in-between on the spectrum of possibilities. In this instance, we are speaking specifically about the Mentor teaching in the classroom.

While every *FIRST* Tech Challenge mentor needs to know and uphold the policies and values of *FIRST* and *FIRST* Tech Challenge, teachers will need to also know, understand, and follow the policies of their school.

FIRST Tech Challenge has resources to help teacher mentors on our [Educators webpage](#).

The Mentor as a Facilitator

As a mentor, it is important to be involved, but it is equally important to make sure the process is directed and completed by students. Mentors differ in the amount of instruction they give their teams. Some give very little, and others give much more. While mentors are often teachers, it is important that the role they play on a team be that of a facilitator. The difference is outlined below:

- Teachers communicate knowledge they have learned on a given subject to one or more people,
- Facilitators enable communication within a group so that everyone contributes knowledge and experience toward the solution.

Students will gain the most from the experience if they are the driving force behind the actual robot planning, building, and programming. The team should design and build the robot with only limited assistance from adult mentors. This way, students may become complex problem solvers by finding solutions themselves and developing confidence in their ability to do so.



In your team's rookie year, focus on enjoying the first year of participation as a survey of the program. The objective should be to fully experience *FIRST* Tech Challenge. Once a team has a positive experience, based on realistic goals, your students will overflow with ideas next year.

Advice for Mentors

Mentoring a team can be one of the most rewarding experiences in a person's life. Like any great reward, it involves a commitment of time and energy. However, it should not be taken too seriously!

Gracious Professionalism® - "Doing your best work while treating others with respect and kindness - It's what makes *FIRST*, first."

The goal of *FIRST* Tech Challenge is to help students have fun with robots while they become comfortable with technology. Whether or not the team is successful at a competition, team members win just by participating.

It is important for every adult to remember that there are responsibilities that come with the adult/student relationship. Young people look up to people they trust and respect and will look to mentors as role models. A mentor's actions will be closely watched and his/her behavior will be perceived as appropriate. Be intentional and conscientious in your behavior and language.

Prior to meeting with students, have a meeting with all mentors to set expectations. This can give adults an opportunity to ask questions they may not want to ask in front of the students, openly discuss topics such as diversity, and discuss ideas and potential problems or concerns about working with young people. If this is a school-affiliated team and the school district has an individual who works with school or business partnerships, they should be invited to this meeting to help answer questions.

[FIRST Youth Protection Program](#) has clear guidelines regarding adult and student interaction. Many school districts and organizations that teams are affiliated do as well. The mentor must understand these policies as well as how to enforce them and communicate these policies to every adult working with the team.

Mentor Time Management

As a mentor, additional time will be needed each week, beyond team meetings, to prepare and coordinate the tasks already discussed.

Effective Mentor Time Management

- Be aware of the [Season Timeline](#) and keep your team focused on upcoming elements.
- Create a realistic meeting schedule. Consider personal and professional commitments, major holidays, and school events.
 - Keep a team calendar posted in the work area. Note key dates, deadlines, and meetings.
 - Entries in the team's Engineering Notebook should coincide with these dates. See the [Engineering Notebook section](#) of this manual for more details.
- Have the team contribute to the selection of deadlines for certain parts of the project, so that they will feel ownership over the process and support mentors in ensuring all deadlines are met.
- Coach students on time management, including breaking larger tasks into smaller steps with deadlines.
- Ask for help. Work with other mentors, parent volunteers, mentors in training, and team members to accomplish team goals, track progress, and meet requirements on time.



Registering the Team

Registration

Registration for *FIRST* Tech Challenge can be accomplished online through our [FIRST webpage](#). New users will be asked to provide contact information for the creation of a new username and password.

Once logged into the account on www.firstinspires.org, a user can:

- Create a new team
- Edit team information.
- Pay for the season registration through the Storefront.
- Access the Storefront to order materials (see [Purchasing Robot Supplies](#) below).
- Once registered in the Team Registration, connect with your local Affiliate Partner for events (see [Registering for Events](#) below).
- Obtain team access to the official [FIRST forums](#).
- Ensure that each team member is registered and has obtained parent consent in the online Youth Team Member Registration System. Read [Information on registering Teams](#).
- Print a team roster, which is required at check-in for events. View a sample team roster in [Appendix C: Sample Team Roster](#).



Purchasing Robot Supplies

Once you have created and registered a team, you will be able to purchase build and electronic supplies through our FIRST Tech Challenge Storefront. This Storefront can be accessed multiple times and you can purchase up to one item from each section. Registration is automatically placed in your cart upon entry. Season Registration must be paid first; however, you can purchase build and electronic supplies later if necessary. Read about the [FIRST Tech Challenge Kit of Parts Options](#).

Registering for Events

Once your team is registered and paid for the season, you will be able to register with the FIRST Tech Challenge Affiliate Partner in your region to compete in events in your area. There are a variety of events for teams to compete in, so be sure to check out the [Events webpage](#) for more information.

To find events in your area, go to the [FIRST Event Portal](#) and select the information that meets your region's criteria. Events are added from May until October, and sometimes even later, so be sure to keep checking back.



All Events (except for the Dual World Championships) must be registered for at the local level. You *MUST* contact your Affiliate Partner to compete locally.

Each region offers varying numbers of events and has different policies about how many teams each event can have, how many events a team can attend in the region, and whether they will allow teams from outside their region to participate. Be sure to contact your Affiliate Partner (info can be found in the [FIRST Regional Contacts Portal](#)) for more information about the events in your region.

Team Identity and Spirit

There is more than just camaraderie on FIRST Tech Challenge teams. Many teams become extended families, with strong, lasting relationships. Students and adults absorb knowledge from each other and grow through a teambuilding and learning process from which everyone benefits.

FIRST Tech Challenge teams and their members come from a variety of backgrounds. New teams should not expect to be like every other team, and experienced teams should not expect to be the same from year to year. Each team will have a different set of skills, experience, and ways of doing things. Each member of the team impacts the dynamic and capabilities of the team, so each time a new member joins, the team dynamic will change a little. Take time to get to know each other and find an approach and style that suits the team and its goals.

Teams are encouraged to develop and promote team identity. It helps to unite the team and develop a sense of belonging and group pride. It is a great way to help Judges, announcers, and audiences to recognize a team at a competition. It can also help teams create a “buzz” about what they are doing in their own communities.

Team Overview

When organizing a team, consider team size, diversity, age and skill level, as well as time commitment and scheduling. Remember, teams grow and change as student interests and abilities develop, and as they move through the educational system. Be prepared for roles and responsibilities to shift throughout and between seasons. What a team member was interested in last year might change as they grow confident and look to explore new opportunities.

Teams can be formed in any environment and need not come solely from a school. Organizations such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H Clubs, church youth organizations, home school communities, or a group of interested students are excellent starting points to form *FIRST* Tech Challenge teams.



It is important to ensure that the team dynamic remains positive, supportive, engaging, and above all, fun. Throughout the experience, team members will face long hours and days working on the robot and awards submissions. Whenever possible and appropriate, keep the atmosphere friendly and add laughter.

Team Size

Every team is different and there is no “ideal” number of students on a team. The minimum number of students is 1, and the maximum number is 15. Ultimately, the size of a team is based upon the mentor’s preference and the interest of the students. You also want to ensure that every student has an active role that they love, and can learn other roles: too large of a team and this becomes harder to do, while too small of a team may end up with team members being overwhelmed with too much responsibility. Strive to achieve the right size balance for your team. In addition, some events will have a 10-student limit for access to the Pit area, so larger teams should define team member roles clearly in advance.

Age Range

A *FIRST* Tech Challenge team is made up of pre-college students and is designed for students in grades 7-12. Students cannot be older than high school-aged if they are participating team members. College students and others who have completed high school are welcome to participate in the role of mentor or coach.

Some mentors find that it is best to stay within a four-year age-span for team members. Depending on the age and maturity level of the team, there may be social and developmental differences with mixed-age teams. This can work as an advantage, but mentors should be prepared to deal with team members from a variety of levels.

Time Commitment

Time commitment for mentors and team members will vary with experience and a team's dynamics. It is important to discuss duties, time commitment, meeting times, and dates up front. If students cannot make a reasonable number of meetings, mentors need to consider this. The level of commitment should be generally the same among all team members. If the team commitment is not high, the mentor should not step in and complete the work. The team needs to learn to take responsibility for the project.

Creating a meeting schedule should be a team effort and should take into consideration the students’ ages, school schedules, and their level of experience in *FIRST* Tech Challenge. Set the team’s schedule per its goals. For example, a rookie team may require longer, more frequent meetings. Read more in the [Mentor Time Management section](#) of this manual.

Time commitment guidelines:

- *FIRST* Tech Challenge recommends starting with two shorter meetings, or one longer meeting per week during the teambuilding stage.
- During the design and build phase, meetings should take place more frequently, as indicated by the team's needs. Depending on the role division, not every team member necessarily needs to be at every meeting.
- To achieve the mission of inspiring students to pursue STEM related majors, and recognizing the many activities competing for their time, we expect students to spend at a minimum 26 hours per season on *FIRST* Tech Challenge, not including the competitions themselves.
 - That would consist of meeting approximately two times a week, for 1-1.5 hours each meeting, for 9-12 weeks.
 - An average student would spend approximately 37 hours total per season; meeting two times a week, 1.5-2 hours per meeting, over 9-12 weeks.
 - At the more intense end students could spend up to 12 hours per week, over a course of 15 weeks, for a total of 180 hours.
- Sessions lasting 1-2 hours are generally the most productive.
- If an Event is scheduled more than eight weeks from the Kickoff date, a less intensive schedule can be created.

Finding Team Members

When recruiting students for a team, it is important to understand the population of the school or local community and focus recruiting efforts on attracting a broad range of students. Make sure recruiting efforts reach a cross-section of the school or community. Recruiting new students based on status on the honor roll or membership in the Science Club automatically limits the number of potential applicants. Recruit by targeting the entire school and welcoming individuals with different skills and experience. Include and encourage a diverse range of individuals to help with recruiting. Students are more likely to be interested in participating if they see and hear someone with whom they can identify.

Suggestions for Recruiting Students

- Use [FIRST videos](#) that show a diverse population of students having fun.
- [Hang posters](#) in the school, at the local library, in businesses, and in sponsor organizations.
- Publish notices in the local paper.
- Include promotional materials in school newsletters or on school web sites.
- Hold a student assembly where there is a *FIRST* Tech Challenge video and a demo.
- Have a local or previous year's team put on a demonstration at a school or community event.
- Give an overview of *FIRST* Tech Challenge in a series of classes where a variety of students are enrolled.
- Engage adults from local corporations, university students, and *FIRST* Alumni to speak about the value of participation.
- Enlist *FIRST* Alumni and participants on other *FIRST* teams to spread the word.
 - [FIRST stories](#)



When planning your recruitment, think about what you can do to attract a wide pool of candidates, such as reaching out to diverse groups in your area.

Selection Criteria

Sometimes you'll have more interested students than spots on your *FIRST* Tech Challenge team. Use a variety of criteria to select them. Make sure that the criteria used for selection will not exclude students who could potentially make valuable contributions to the team.

Effective selection criteria might include:

- Interest in joining *FIRST* Tech Challenge
- Recommendations from teachers, coaches, supervisors, employers, or community members, etc.
- A strong commitment to the meeting schedule, without conflicting commitments to other teams, clubs, or employers.
- Diversity of backgrounds, skills, or experience will create depth to the team.

When there are more students who meet the minimum criteria for participation than there are spots on the team, it will be necessary to decide which of the students will be invited to participate. Be as objective as possible in the selection of team members. Think about team growth and development over time. Encourage students who may not have been selected this season to participate in upcoming seasons when spots on teams may open or interest levels may prompt the establishment of new teams.

If you have a large pool of interested students, consider starting additional team(s) to accommodate the interest. Many schools have multiple teams, and mentors should consider creating additional teams when possible. Adults can be recruited to act as mentors, or existing mentors may choose to start a second team themselves.

Finding Team Mentors

Anyone can be a *FIRST* Tech Challenge mentor. Time and interest are the only requirements. As with the team, having a diverse pool of mentors only benefits the team. Some mentors bring business expertise, some technical expertise, some are great at marketing, while others have leadership skills with experience in building strong teams. A *FIRST* Tech Challenge team can use all these skills.

Each team will need at least two screened, committed adults to see them through the season from start to finish, but these do not have to be mentors with technical skills. Mentors can recruit other adults to serve a shorter time commitment and act as technical mentors. For example, a team might need help with wiring their robot, so they find an electrician who comes in for two meetings to help them learn wiring skills and perfect their wiring plan.



Lots of adults will want to help the team but be unable to commit to the whole season, so understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the lead mentors and the team's needs will help to identify the areas where additional support will be needed. Target your recruiting efforts to those areas.

Recruiting Mentors

Mentors may be parents, teachers, engineers, college students, Scout leaders, *FIRST* Alumni, or members of the local community.

When recruiting a mentor, be sure to consider diversity. Young people may be more comfortable if there are mentors on the team with backgrounds like their own. Students can also learn a great deal from individuals with varied life, work, and learning experiences. Below are just some of the tools that may be used to recruit a diverse group of mentors.

Recruiting New Technical Mentors

Always start by identifying the help you need and the time commitment that assistance will require. Some folks are happy to help if they know it will only require a few hours from them.

It's important that you know your community. Truly, a wonderful technical member could be anywhere, just waiting for you to ask them for help! Start by polling your team's parents and families and see if there are any technical mentors in that group. Also, many mentors from *FIRST*® LEGO® League and *FIRST*® Robotics Competition would be happy to support a *FIRST* Tech Challenge team, so ask the other *FIRST* teams in your area, including other *FIRST* Tech Challenge teams. Some teams or mentors might also be willing to video chat and aid long-distance.

If you are still unable to locate the help you need, try these locations:

- High school teachers or college professors
- Leaders of community organizations, such as the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)
- Leading corporations in local communities, such as Collins Aerospace or PTC
- Local chapters of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME): <http://www.asme.org>
- Senior Corps: <http://www.seniorcorps.org>
- Society for Women Engineers (SWE): <http://www.swe.org>
- National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE): <http://www.nsbe.org>
- Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE): <http://www.shpe.org>



If your team is a diverse mix of students, consider reaching out to potential mentors with some of the diverse qualities of the students to provide positive role models. For example, an all-girl team might recruit a female engineer to mentor the team.

Recruiting New Non-Technical Mentors

Some teams don't need technical help; they need support for printing, stapling, painting, coloring, driving to events, cleaning, fundraising, etc. Or they might need help developing a Business Plan or learning about college and career preparation. As mentioned earlier, always start by identifying the help you need and the time commitment that assistance will require. Some folks are happy to help if they know it will only require a few hours from them or if they can do the work while watching their favorite TV program at night.

Next, ask the team members and their families, or the other *FIRST* teams in your area, including other *FIRST* Tech Challenge teams. If you are still unable to locate the help you need, try these locations:

- Teachers, coaches, school administrators
- Community organizations, including Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Boys and Girls Club, but also Elks Club, Kiwanis Club, etc.
- Leading corporations in local communities, whether technical or not. Lots of companies encourage their employees to volunteer.
- [Senior Corps](#).

Team Meetings

It is important to set a regular schedule and procedure for team meetings. Make sure all mentors, team members, and parents are aware of commitments and the procedure to be followed at meetings. For more tips, refer to the [Mentor Time Management section](#) and the [Time Commitment section](#) of this Manual.

Teams can meet anywhere that is appropriate. For a school-based program, the school itself is ideal. Schools usually have the computers and space to set up a playing field (for more information on setting up a Playing Field, refer to the game documents available on [The FIRST Tech Challenge Game webpage](#)). Depending on the situation, teams may also meet in a private home, a meeting hall, or a company conference room.



Things to consider:

- Be sure that planned activities and work hours do not conflict with the host's use of the space.
- Evening or weekend use of the building may require special authorization. Be sure to ask permission to use the site's computers to program the team's robot. Before installing software, check with the site host.
- Schools may require background checks for any adults working in the school. These take time. Ask the site to explain any adult supervision and child safety requirements to team mentors.

Select a work place that has as many of the following as possible:

- Internet access
- Enough space to host the entire team, the computers, and all supplies.
- A secure place to store the parts and partially assembled robot between team meetings.
- Good lighting, at least in the worktable area.
- Simple sets of tools for working with parts.
- Work tables and chairs.
- Space for at least a partial practice field. Room on the ends will be needed for drivers. **Note:** a full-sized field is 12' X 12' (3.66 m x 3.66 m).

Meetings

At the first team meeting, outline a list of rules and procedures to be followed throughout the coming weeks. Work with students to establish these rules and explain that some are inflexible (such as rules about [safety](#), [Gracious Professionalism](#), or respect), and other rules may be open to revision as the team evolves and discovers new approaches to problems or procedural challenges (such as who completes documentation tasks in the [Engineering Notebook](#) and at what point in the meeting this occurs).

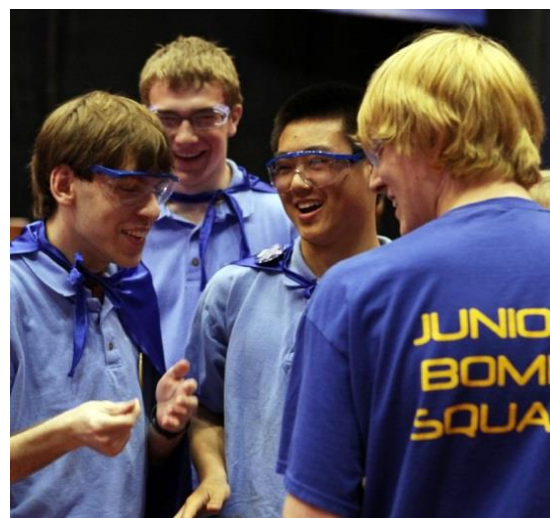
General Guidelines for Effective Meetings

- Maintain an accurate email list that includes parents.
- Start and end on time. This helps parents and lets students know that punctuality is important, and that time must be used effectively.

- Keep most meetings in the range of 2-3 hours. This is long enough to get organized and accomplish something, but focused enough that students do not lose interest. Aim to meet for about seven to ten hours per week, starting immediately after the new game is announced. Time management is a key factor in a team's success.
- Toward the end of the season, meetings may need to be longer for testing and repairing the robot.
- If a meeting is right after school, have a snack ready at the start. (This also may help ensure students will show up on time). Make clear rules about eating and drinking near the robot, tools, and playing field.
- Schedule approximately 15 minutes at the start of each meeting for a check-in or teambuilding activity to set the tone for the group and how you will use your time together.
- Schedule approximately 15 minutes at the end of every meeting for clean-up. If some team members are going to stay and work longer, clean-up should still be complete at the end of the normal time. This should include maintenance such as sweeping the floor, cleaning up from snack time, and dumping trash. In terms of clean-up, teams should be encouraged to pick up after themselves. The coach should do nothing more than lock doors when the team is done.
- Take pictures of team meetings and events. Use a checklist of team members so there are a few pictures of each student.

Setting Expectations

- Clearly communicate meeting schedules with students and parents.
- Set clear expectations for participation from the first meeting and follow up with team members who are frequently absent. Not every meeting will involve every student. Some meetings may focus on programming, while others may focus on driver training.
- Keep students aware of deadlines. At the beginning of each meeting, have a brief progress review and set the objectives for the day. Document objectives and progress in the Engineering Notebook at the end of each meeting.
- Identify what the team is working to accomplish and establish criteria for agreement as necessary. It is also a good idea to write the objectives for the day on a board, a large piece of paper, or another visually prominent place in the workspace. This will help students stay focused throughout the meeting.
- Review the team's [Engineering Notebook](#), team goals, and the team calendar weekly to see if the team is on track.
- Ensure students are sharing tasks.



Working Together

- Have some teambuilding activities to help all members of the team get to know each other and some of their key interests.
- Teach members how to organize the tools and parts per an established system, or have the team agree on a system of its own. Label the locations for storing different items.
- Use brainstorming techniques to get input from everyone and write down all ideas. Weigh alternatives against the objective criteria that have been previously established. Some common techniques are weighted voting, combining similar ideas, testing the feasibility of an idea, and group consensus.
- Have students write down any decisions in the engineering notebook and state which ones will be implemented.
- Be sure to ask if there is anyone who does not understand the solution/plan.
- Implement the selected solution and make sure what is put into practice meets the original intent.

Building Robots

Safety for FIRST Tech Challenge

One of the first things a team should review is safety. Introduce the topic at the first meeting and mention that each person will be responsible for both team and personal safety. Stress safety at each meeting and post a list of safe practices in the meeting area!

Ensure students have at least one partner at the work location, while traveling, and at the events. This way, if an accident or problem occurs, there is help nearby. When traveling to events, make sure students also have the mentor's contact information and room numbers.



Supervision

- Adult supervision is required always, especially when using power tools and electrical systems.
- Students should be trained on the proper use of tools and pass a safety test before using them. This includes simple hand tools as well as power tools.
- Mentors cannot be everywhere always. Students should speak to mentors if they observe other students acting unsafely.

Apparel

From the first meeting, make sure all members have the appropriate clothing for working in the workspace and around the robot, including [ANSI-approved non-shaded safety glasses](#). Rose, blue, and amber tints are *FIRST* approved, but reflective lenses are not, because participant's eyes must be clearly visible to others always.

- Make sure that each person has safety glasses and:
 - Labels their glasses with their name and team number, and has a place to store them.
 - Wears them always when working on the robot or when near someone working on the robot.
 - Wears the required side shields.
 - Wears safety glasses over corrective eyeglasses if they are not polycarbonate or a similar material.
 - Is especially careful when near machining equipment.
- Wear closed-toed and closed-heeled shoes. These are required at all *FIRST* events and should be required at all team meetings.
- Wear appropriate clothing when working. Do not wear loose clothing, dangling jewelry, or other items that could be caught in the machinery. Long hair should be tied back for the same reason.
- Use earplugs to protect hearing when using loud equipment or at loud events.



***FIRST* has strict requirements for safety glasses in the Pit area and on or within five feet of the Playing Field. Safety glasses are required at all *FIRST* Tech Challenge competitions. Without them, students will not be allowed in these areas.**

The Workspace

- Keep a first aid kit in the workspace always, including disinfectant and bandages. Bring it to events. Any accidents should be reported immediately to mentors. Make sure there is a telephone in the workspace always, in case of a more serious injury.

- Have a fire extinguisher in the workspace, and ensure that everyone knows where it is and how to use it.
- The workspace should be kept clean and uncluttered. Cords should be kept out of walking paths, and tools and materials should be kept in a designated storage area when not in use.

General Safety Practices

Encourage students to be aware of their surroundings always. Walk through hazards in the workspace, and ensure that students understand the necessary precautions for dealing with:

- Stored energy hazards, electrical, mechanical, and pneumatic springs, chains and gears, batteries, pneumatic cylinders and lines, extended “arms,” bound joints, and lifted weights.
- Hazards of the autonomous mode.
- Electrical hazards.
- Pinching and crushing hazards.
- Trips and falls prevention.
- Horseplay of any kind cannot be permitted in the workspace. Even small motors and mechanisms can be dangerous.
- Always turn off the main power switch or unplug the external battery before doing any repair or adjustment to the robot.
- Inappropriate emotional or physical behaviors/actions cannot be permitted. Establish a reporting procedure for this type of harassment and discuss it with the group.

Kit of Parts

Teams can order their robot supplies through what is called the *FIRST* Tech Challenge Storefront, which is accessed through your account on www.firstinspires.org. Registration is automatically added to your cart. You can enter the storefront multiple times and purchase up to one item from each category. Awarded grants will appear in the storefront and automatically deduct from the final total. If you do not see a grant that you were expecting, please DO NOT check out. Please check again in a few days.

FIRST Tech Challenge has created [resources](#) to assist mentors in ordering robot supplies through the Team Registration.

The chart on the next page details each of the *FIRST* Tech Challenge Storefront Kit of Parts options and what is included:

STEP 1

Choose ONE Control Communications Set

This set includes the primary controller for the robot. It also facilitates communication between the robot and its human drivers.

Set 1 Ideal for Returning (Veteran) Teams	\$219.00	Set 2 Ideal for New (Rookie) Teams	\$249.00	Set 3	\$44.99
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moto G phones and covers (2) USB 2.0 A Male to Mini-B Cable USB Hub Micro to USB OTG cable (2) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moto G phones and covers (2) USB 2.0 A Male to Mini-B Cable USB Hub Micro to USB OTG cable (2) Logitech Gamepad F310 (2) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> USB Hub Micro to USB OTG cable (2) Logitech Gamepad F310 (2) 	

STEP 2

Choose Electronics Modules and Sensors Set

This set allows the robot to interact with external devices including motors, servos, and sensors. It also includes a basic set of sensors.

Electronics Modules and Sensors Set	\$129.00
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> REV Robotics Expansion Hub Phillips head screws (4pc) & nylock nuts (4pc) set Power Switch w/ bracket & XT to Tamiya adapter cable Color Sensor with cable Touch Sensor with cable Motor Power Cable 	

STEP 3

Choose ONE Competition Set

This kit can be used to construct the physical body of the robot.

TETRIX FIRST® Tech Challenge Competition Set	\$532.00	REV FIRST® Tech Challenge Competition Set	\$444.00
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brackets and mounts Structural channels, angles, & plates Wheels and gears Omni wheels Battery pack and charger Hard Point Connectors Servos and DC Motors Fasteners and tools New TETRIX® MAX pieces 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aluminum robot structure Metal and Plastic structural brackets DC motors and Smart Robot servos 3 types of servo attachments Motor and servo power/data cables Bearings and shafts Multiple wheel options (Omni, traction, intake) Sprockets and chain 7 sizes of gears New REV Building System parts! Fasteners and tools Slim Robot Battery and charger 	

STEP 4

Go to FIRST® Tech Challenge Storefront

Add the selected kit of part items above to your cart in the Storefront. Registration will automatically be added. You do not need to complete your entire order in one visit. You may enter the Storefront multiple times to purchase all your necessary items.

Any awarded grants from FIRST® will also appear in your cart and will be deducted automatically from the final total. If you do not see a grant you were expecting, please do not check out. Check again in a few days or contact ETCgrants@firstinspires.org.

Developing Strategy

Developing an effective strategy for game play is part of the *FIRST* Tech Challenge experience and is vital to a team's success. As a team builds and programs its robot, it is important to make decisions about strategy and incorporate them into the design of the robot.

In determining strategy, analyze the point breakdown of the game and identify which tasks yield the most points. Also consider how long tasks will take. Consider the autonomous, tele-op, and end game portions of the games separately at first, and then determine how to integrate the three sections in an overall strategy for your robot design.

Brainstorming

Before moving into approaches for a game challenge, it is important to make sure everyone understands the rules, compliance restrictions, and has read the [Game Manuals](#) carefully. Clear up any questions or confusion about these things before moving into the brainstorming process. Although training for programming, CAD, etc. can come later, these pieces can vastly improve what students know about robots, the Kit of Parts, and the potential designs.

Effective Brainstorming for *FIRST* Tech Challenge

- Discuss general strategies for achieving different objectives without referencing specific mechanisms.
- Discuss strategies without deliberating on how a robot would achieve that strategy (e.g., shooting the ball through the air, elevating the ball without shooting it).
- There are many different mechanisms to do each of these tasks, but do not talk about them yet. Note any ideas for mechanisms if they come up, but keep the conversation focused on big ideas because talking about the mechanisms too early may lead a team to overlook the best solution.
- Try to be comprehensive and do not reject ideas unless it is impossible or against game rules.
- For big ideas, try to think of every possible class of mechanism that could implement that strategy.
- Document all ideas in the Engineering Notebook. They may be useful later.
- Evaluate alternative designs and the advantages and disadvantages of each possible mechanism.
- Think about speed. Will this mechanism generally be faster or slower than others?
- Consider accuracy. How consistently does the mechanism achieve the desired result?
- Complexity is an important consideration. Will the team be able to build it and keep it working and properly adjusted?
- Think about the size and weight of the robot. Will this design fit in the robot's required dimensions?
- Consider programming requirements. Does this mechanism require sensors and programming that might be difficult to integrate?
- Rank each mechanism per how likely it is to be the best solution. Consider how each mechanism will help to score points in competition.
- Try to solve all the problems. Explore all possibilities.
- There are game time limits, so always consider speed when evaluating different designs.
- Start with a basic, solid design, and then improve it incrementally, using sensors or refinements.
- Start simple, test and take measurements, identify ways to improve, make those changes, and then test again.
- There is always the option of sticking with or going back to a simpler design.
- Test thoroughly.
- Avoid single points of failure whenever possible! Always consider what the result would be if one single item on the robot failed. Would this take the robot totally out of action, or just be a minor irritation? If there is a single point of failure, check it constantly and make sure it can be quickly repaired by the pit crew if necessary.

FIRST Tech Challenge Basic Bot Guide

With the help of FIRST Tech Challenge Volunteers of the Year, David and Lydean Spangler, the [Basic Bot Guide](#) has been made available to rookie teams to help them practice robot building strategies. This guide takes a team step-by-step through building a basic, but fully-functional robot. Building the Basic Bot can provide new teams with examples of some fundamental building principles. Teams can then apply the principles learned to their own robot design for the current year's challenge.

Designing a Robot

It is important to remember that design is an iterative, ever-changing process and that effective design involves making compromises. In general, it is best to keep design simple whenever possible. In the engineering world, simple solutions are much more desirable than complex ones. The complex solution has many more places to fail, is more difficult to repair, costs more, and its operation is less intuitive. Students are sometimes drawn to complex solutions. Keep reinforcing the principle of simplicity. Ask the team to distill its ideas to make the solution as simple as possible. Driving and operating a robot can be challenging with a variety of obstacles on the playing field. At times like this, a simple robot is far easier to use than one that requires many complex steps to perform a task.

What?

Think about what the robot will need to do, what it can do to compete in the game, and what kinds of objects the robot will need to manipulate. These discussions all involve trade-offs and compromises, as it may be impossible to do everything at once. Teams will need to decide what is most important to them.

How?

Once it has been decided “what” the robot will do, it is necessary to figure out “how” the robot will do it. This is often more difficult. It is easy to decide “We need the robot to pick up a parking-cone,” but it is difficult to figure out a feasible way to do it within the FIRST Tech Challenge restrictions. This is where experimentation is important. In general, FIRST Tech Challenge robot design can be divided into two major categories: drive train and mechanism.

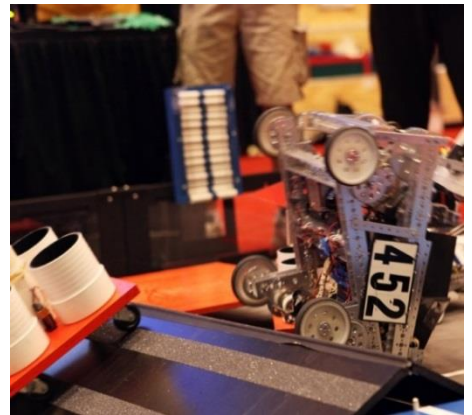
Robot Drive Train Design

One of the major systems of the robot is the drive train, the system that moves the robot around on the field. There are many different drive train configurations, but they all consist of:

- One or more motors
- Some means of transferring their torque/motion to the floor (a wheel, etc.)
- Some means of steering

The most traditional drive train configuration is called “skid-steer,” sometimes called “tank drive.” This is a system in which each “side” of the drive train is powered independently; turning is completed by running one side forward and the other side in reverse.

There are many options, and drive train design is often a matter of personal preference. It does not matter what the drive train looks like if it is capable of performing the following specific tasks:



It is often better to be very good at one thing than mediocre at everything. Once the team has decided what to do, it must figure out how to best accomplish the task.

- Moving the robot at a “reasonable” speed without overloading the motors.
- Turning/Maneuvering at a “reasonable” rate without overloading the motors.
- Overcoming any required field obstacles. (Climb stairs, etc.).

The team ultimately determines what defines an acceptable performance. Experiment and determine what works best. There are ways to tweak the drive train to enhance performance in several areas, but like most aspects of design, trade-offs and compromises will need to be made.

Robot Mechanism Design

In addition to moving around the playing field, a *FIRST* Tech Challenge robot must manipulate various objects. Manipulation is perhaps the hardest aspect of the *FIRST* Tech Challenge, especially for newer teams. What looks simple to humans can be extremely difficult for a robot. Try to create a system that effectively utilizes the available resources to accomplish as many tasks as possible.

Most years, the *FIRST* Tech Challenge Games include several different methods of scoring. Each team must decide which methods of scoring are most important and how they will accomplish them. It is often impossible to design one system to do everything, and this is where every team must make design compromises. It is important to help teams prioritize robot functions, design as many options as possible, and attempt to build mechanisms that perform multiple tasks.



Do not waste time trying to get a perfect working model right away. What is learned from the quick and rough prototype may completely change a final approach. Try to get multiple sub-teams working on various solutions simultaneously. Competition and learning can be effective motivators.

Use real world examples for design inspiration. Take field trips around the community to look at machines and mechanisms that are used to accomplish tasks like those required for the competition, such as forklift trucks or cranes. Look through books or conduct online research into different machines and their functions.

Take those ideas that apply to the task, and work to convert them to the challenge. After the team researches mechanisms for a while, brainstorm and then prototype the ideas the team selects.

Notes:

- Try to minimize the weight and complexity of manipulators. Large, heavy accessories bog down the robot, waste batteries, and cause navigation to become less predictable and repeatable.
- The more complex a design is, the more likely it is to fail during competition. Encourage the team to look for simple solutions that will work consistently at the event and be better in the long run.

3-D Modeling Software

Another option for design and prototyping is the use of 3-D modeling or CAD (computer-aided design) software. This kind of software uses computer technology to design and document design. Elements can be modeled and assembled in the software to test and observe their effectiveness. CAD also allows teams to design their own parts to 3-D print.

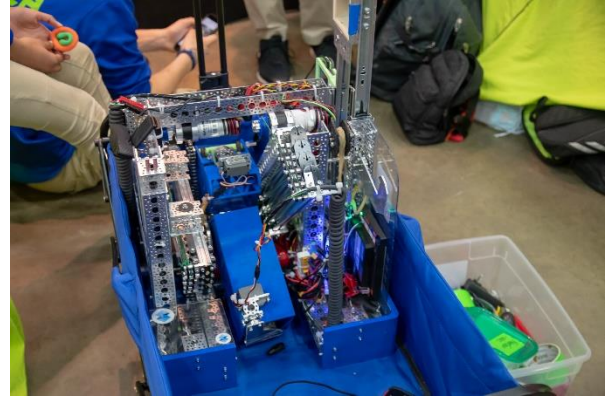
While learning to use these types of software can take some extra time, it is a valuable skill for students to learn, is of great benefit when designing and prototyping a robot, and an excellent experience for students interested in drafting and design for future careers.

Prototyping

The [Kit of Parts](#) provides for an infinite number of design possibilities. It is easy to build something, test it, and then rebuild it into something else. Brainstorm a multitude of ways to accomplish the team's goals, and then test them to see what works best. This is called prototyping.

Once there is a working design, do not be afraid to modify it so it works better - and then do not be afraid to modify it again! Emphasize to students that it is okay to try things again and again to improve the machine and increase results.

Students, especially new team members, should spend some time simply playing around with the parts. This can take place before the new season's game is announced, and it is vital for students to develop an innate understanding of what the parts can and cannot do, how they fit together, etc. After the game is announced, experimenting with parts with the game goals in mind can still be useful for visualizing solutions.



During initial prototyping, do not worry too much about size or material limitations. Focus on getting something that works to solve a game problem. Once a concept has been proven, teams can focus on reducing the size or bringing the design back into materials compliance.

Try multiple prototypes for each sub-system and worry about hooking it all together later. Use two-dimensional corrugated cardboard, plastic, or foam models to quickly determine feasibility and dimensions.

Cut everything to scale. Once precise dimensions are determined, use the prototype parts to trace for cutting the real material. If new templates are made, be sure to mark the old one "OBSOLETE" to prevent confusion.

Objectively evaluate the prototypes before deciding which mechanisms to use. Often students and adults get emotionally invested in ideas or directions. To get the best mechanism, set aside those feelings and use objective evidence as the only criteria for judging one design versus another. Document all prototyping and testing carefully. Even if considerable time is spent and a mechanism is rejected, this provides a valuable real-life engineering experience, and demonstrates sound decision-making and innovation to the Judges.

Building

Once planning, brainstorming, design, and prototyping are completed, building the robot for the game challenge can begin. Each year, the *FIRST* Tech Challenge game challenge will become available to teams at Kickoff in September. Be sure to check material limits, types of materials, dimensions, and building strategies for compliance with *FIRST* Tech Challenge rules. Ensure that the team is very familiar with these rules, and that they are checked regularly for updates.



Use colored tape or small labels to identify small hex keys that are not marked clearly with their size. Ensure students know which hex key size or color is used with particular elements.

Notes:

- From year to year, the minimum required parts and compliance standards change, so make sure to consult the most current [Game Manual](#) for details.
- It is also a good idea to keep receipts and document any parts that have been purchased for use that have not been provided in the *FIRST* Tech Challenge Kit of Parts. These can be helpful to have if questions come up during Inspection at Tournaments.

In addition to the tools provided in the Kit of Parts, additional tools may be required to assemble the model, customize elements, and modify the robot as required. Remember to review safety practices and safe tool handling with students before anyone gets to work.

Recommended Tools	Additional Power Tools	Helpful Supplies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allen Wrench, 7/64" • Allen Wrench, 1/8" • Wrench (open end / box end), 5/16" • Wrench (open end / box end), 1/4" • Hacksaw, 32 tooth blade • Hand Files (flat and round) • Wire Strippers • Wire Cutters • Needle Nosed Pliers • Locking Pliers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soldering Iron • Jigsaw • Drill • Heat Gun • Drill Press 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shrink Wire Wrap • Electrical Tape • Black and Red Wire • Wire Loom • Zip Ties • Blue Thread Locker • Gear and Axle Lubricant • Extra Fuses for 12V Battery

Teams should not get locked into continually trying to improve a bad design. Sometimes it may be necessary to step back, rethink, tear down, and rebuild a robot. Times like these are great opportunities to return to the Engineering Notebook to investigate other concepts and strategies that were recorded during the brainstorming, design, and prototyping stages of the development process.

Modifying Parts

Non-electric parts can be drilled, cut, or otherwise modified to create customized elements for each robot. This provides an excellent learning experience for students, but also requires a little extra caution. Try not to cut metal parts unless it is necessary. Remind students that building supplies are limited, so they should always measure twice and cut once. Students who are unsure should have a partner or mentor help them double-check their measurements and angles until they are confident doing it themselves. When customizing metal parts, it is important to smooth or cover any sharp edges. These precautions should be taken to avoid injury and to prevent damage to wires and other components as robots compete on the field.

Teams may also make parts from scratch, using materials such as bar stock, sheet goods, etc.

General Building Best Practices

- Design to facilitate easy repair. Make sure that every part is accessible and easy to fix for quick and painless pit repair.
- Build the robot for competition. Consider the outcome of different types of collisions and add guards and bumpers in the design to minimize impact. Protect wires and position motors so that the end of the wire is inside the robot body.
- As screws, nuts, and washers are removed from the robot or from early prototypes, check them for damage and discard or mark parts that are no longer perfect.
- Investigate and experiment with gear ratios.
- Investigate and experiment with traction.
- Make sure that only flat metal or plastic elements are under or around the battery mounting position. Sharp objects, screws, or nuts are dangerous in this location.
- At the end of each build session, unplug all chargers.
- Always double-check to make sure that fuses are matched exactly in type and amperage, and never use anything other than the correct fuse to bridge the connection, because batteries can overheat and catch fire if too much current is drawn.

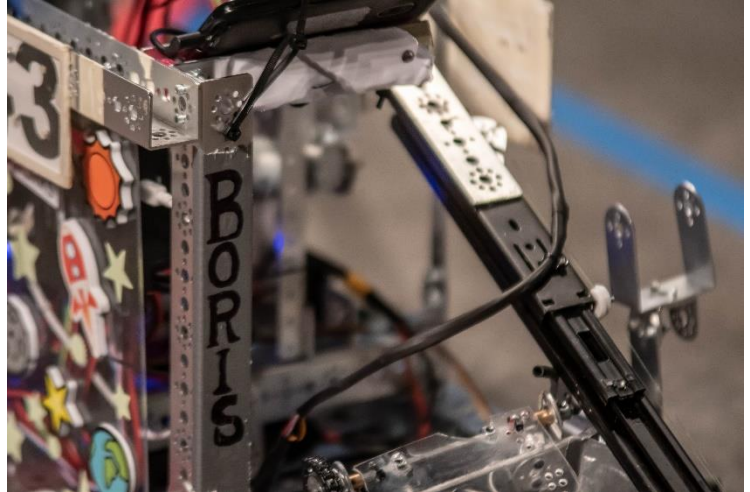
- Reroute wires through channels where possible, for safety, and to prevent entanglement.
- Position the kill switch where it will be least likely to be accidentally tripped during game play.
- Watch the [Materials to Enhance Robot Design](#) instructional video for more ideas.

Wiring

Wiring is one of the most important components of a robot. However, wiring often does not receive the same care and attention as the rest of the robot. Even the briefest of power interruptions can cause the communication system to have to reboot. Good wiring allows teams to create tight connections and to better troubleshoot problems as they occur. Good wiring takes a lot of patience and practice, and teams should budget time accordingly.

In addition to building a great robot, there are best practices for general wiring of the robot – good habits to start as soon as possible.

- Make wiring diagrams
- Use the proper tools
- Label the wires
- Keep it neat
- Use proper wire management
- Tie it all down
- Be careful with power switch placement
- Conduct proper maintenance



For more information on wiring best practices, check out our Robot Wiring Guide on our [Robot Building Resources webpage](#).

Programming

Software

Java is the recommended programming languages for the FIRST Tech Challenge. The minimum allowed version number is 5.2. Programming must be done using one of the following applications:

- FIRST* Tech Challenge Blocks Development tool a visual, blocks-based programming tool hosted by the robot controller.
- Android Studio – a text-based integrated development environment.
- Java Native Interface (JNI) & Android Native Development Kit (NDK) – Teams can incorporate native code libraries into their apps using the JNI framework and the Android NDK.
- FIRST* Tech Challenge OnBot Java Programming tool - a text-based integrated development environment hosted by the robot controller.

If mandatory updates are announced by *FIRST* later in the season, Teams must install them before the time of competition. Additionally, beta versions of the software are allowed at official Tournaments.

For those who have some experience with the software but little experience applying it within the context of *FIRST* Tech Challenge, sample programs, programming guides, and video tutorials have been provided with the online activities for teams in the following resources:

- [Basic 'Bot Guide](#)
- [FIRST Tech Challenge Technology Forum](#)
- [Robot Building Resources](#)
- [Programming Resources](#)

Programming

It is always a good idea to have more than one team member responsible for the programming and to have all team members familiar with it. A good way to achieve this is to assign each team member a tutorial to present to the rest of the group.



Occasionally, a software vendor might make changes to their programming package. Make sure to check the [FIRST Tech Challenge Team Resources](#) webpage for software update advisories and software update links.

- Create a flowchart to make the programming more of a team effort; to keep with good programming practices, have the team create this flowchart as a group effort. Keep the flowchart simple, and only outline the major steps of the program as blocks. Leave it to the programming team to fill in the details of each block, with the understanding that if they get stuck on a block, they can, and should, ask the rest of the team for assistance.
- Test and archive once the programming team is ready to test the program. Have them prepare a simple set of instructions and turn the testing over to a testing team. It is better to have team members who are not intimate with the code do the testing, following only a simple set of instructions.

FIRST Tech Challenge Android-Based Technology

The Android-based technology uses a point-to-point system. Teams should refer to the below resources during the season for additional help:

- [Basic Bot Guide](#)
- [FIRST Tech Challenge Technology Forum](#)
- [Robot Building Resources](#)

General Programming Best Practices for FIRST Tech Challenge

- Always back up programs before the start of each programming session. A copy of the last working version should always be available, in case of a broken program.
- Create flow charts of code and include them in the Engineering Notebook.
- Create comments on the code, right from the beginning. This helps with debugging and with situations in which another programmer needs to step in and work on the code.
- Avoid cryptic names. Variable names are much more readable and less likely to be forgotten over time. ("MotorLeftFront" is much more descriptive than "mtr_S1_C1.") Use the same prefix for multiple variables that belong to the same physical structure or concept.
- By the time autonomous programming begins, structural changes to the robot hardware should be complete, especially anything involving the wheels and drive train. After any significant hardware change, the autonomous programs must be tested and re-adjusted if necessary. Remember that a simple thing like changing wheel size will change the robot's speed.
- Do not try to accomplish all the tasks for the entire challenge at the same time. This is especially true for the programming team. Working through each step individually may be less exciting for students, but it is a more accurate and efficient approach to the problem in the long run.
- Allow some settling time after a motion or turn. Allow about 100 milliseconds to let the robot finish all its movement actions before beginning again.
- Design repeatable tests for all major subsystems. Document baseline tests in the [Engineering Notebook](#). Compare improvements with the baseline and document them as well. Track how well the autonomous mode works at different battery levels, so there are no surprises. Test sensors under different conditions (e.g., test light and color sensors under different lighting conditions).

- Make small changes and test frequently. If several things are changed all at once and something does not work, it can be hard to figure out where the problem is.
- Make sure to practice using the same version that will be used at the competition. The final practice before any competition should be run using the latest software, so there is time to address any new problems that the changes may introduce.
- Think about all the ways a system could fail, and conduct trials to determine them. Figure out which failure modes are the most prevalent and concentrate on fixing them first.

Iteration

It takes a lot of planning and trial and error to build a successful robot. One of the advantages to the [Season Timeline](#) is the opportunity for teams to continue to work on their robot before, during, and after competitions – and again before the next level of competition. Teams are constantly seeing what other teams are doing, learning new skills, and identifying strategies that might require changes to the robot. Don't be afraid to change your robot! The engineering process depends on the willingness to try something new, scrap it, and then try something else.

The Engineering Notebook

One of the goals of *FIRST* and *FIRST* Tech Challenge is to recognize the engineering design process and the journey that a team makes. This journey encompasses the phases of the problem definition, concept design, system-level design, detailed design, test and verification, and production of the robot.

Throughout the process of designing and building a robot, teams will come across obstacles, lessons learned, and the need to draw things out on paper. This is where teams use an Engineering Notebook. These notebooks track a team from the beginning of the season and throughout the competition season. Judges review a team's Engineering Notebook to better understand the journey, design, and team as a whole.

The Engineering Notebook is a documentation of the team's robot design and records the time spent doing research, outreach, team meetings, and plans for growth. This documentation should include:

- Sketches
- Discussions and team meetings
- Design evolution
- Software development
- Processes, obstacles
- Each team member's thoughts throughout the journey for the entire season

A new notebook should be created for each new season.

Teams should carefully read *FIRST* Tech Challenge Game Manual Part 1 for more information on the engineering notebook. Teams can also review the [Engineering Notebook Guidelines and Self-Assessment](#) and the [Engineering Notebook Examples](#) on the Team Management Resources webpage.

Outreach Activities for Teams

Community Outreach

A vital component of *FIRST* Tech Challenge is helping to build the *FIRST* community by introducing more young people to the experience, and by celebrating science, technology, and engineering. Outreach events

include activities to encourage students and mentors to join existing robotics teams or to start new teams, as well as to raise awareness of robotics in education in general. While it may seem counterintuitive for teams to try to create new competitors, the bigger picture is that *FIRST* is not about the competition, but about changing the culture by inspiring students. The more teams there are, then the more students there are to inspire.

FIRST stresses community involvement in several ways, including recognition via *FIRST* Tech Challenge Awards, such as the Inspire, Motivate, Connect, and Promote Awards.

Suggestions for Community Outreach

- Contact regional *FIRST* organizations and volunteer to support their activities.
- Connect with other teams online, and reach out to others in the community, both near and far. This can be done through social media (*FIRST* Tech Challenge social media accounts, Facebook groups, LinkedIn, etc) or via unofficial groups designed just for this purpose, such as [FIRST Ladies and the FTC Tec Network](#).
- Get parents involved. Parents are their children's greatest supporters. They are incredibly valuable as volunteers, cheerleaders and advocates for the benefits of *FIRST*. Give parents the opportunity to learn more about what their children are doing and to develop their own enthusiasm and appreciation for science, technology, and engineering.
- Assist in the development of new *FIRST* teams. Mentor another team or simply act as a resource for a new mentor or for a community member who is interested in getting involved with *FIRST*. Recruit new mentors. Read about [FIRST Tech Challenge Teams Mentoring Teams in this FIRST Tech Challenge blog post](#).
- Lead a workshop for a local partner. Help other teams in the local community develop their skills and abilities by supporting them as they learn a new programming language or work with a new mechanism. Share the experience and knowledge that has been gained through previous years of participation. Read about [FIRST Tech Challenge Teams doing outreach in this FIRST Tech Challenge blog post](#).
- Hold an open practice, build day, or scrimmage. Use the Tournament Guide located on the [FIRST Tech Challenge Volunteer Resources webpage](#)!
- Do a demonstration at a local event or community center. During outreach events, make sure that there are regular opportunities for team members to briefly describe the robot and what robotics means to them.
- Promote *FIRST* in the community through positive word of mouth and local media, where appropriate. Create flyers to hand out at events or create a press release about upcoming events and distribute it to local newspapers or websites or use [FIRST Tech Challenge Outreach & Marketing Resources webpage](#).
- Participate in community activities and service opportunities. Wear your team or *FIRST* Tech Challenge gear and talk about your experiences. Read this [FIRST Tech Challenge blog post on Making it Loud](#).



Using the *FIRST* and *FIRST* Tech Challenge Logos

Download the *FIRST* and *FIRST* Tech Challenge logos, the *FIRST* Branding & Design Standards, and the Policy on the Use of *FIRST* Trademarks and Copyrighted Materials from the *FIRST* web at <https://www.firstinspires.org/brand>.

Advantages to Outreach

Most *FIRST* teams participate in outreach activities, or opportunities to showcase their skills and knowledge to the “outside” or non-*FIRST* world. Outreach activities can benefit teams by:

- Allowing teams to practice their public speaking skills and help prepare them for [Judging Interviews](#).
- Providing a public audience to showcase the learning the students are going through.
- Creating networking opportunities for the team and individual members.
- Introducing *FIRST* Tech Challenge to potential new team members or mentors.
- Recruiting additional teams to *FIRST* and creating connections between *FIRST* teams.
- Helping achieve the mission of *FIRST* by raising awareness of *FIRST*, *FIRST* Programs, and STEM.
- Connecting the team to potential sponsors.

Navigating the Competition Season

Preparing the Team

FIRST Tech Challenge competitions are different from almost any other experience your students will have had, so helping them be prepared for what they will encounter will allow them to be more confident and focused on the team’s objectives for the event. The following sections provide lots of information and tips on helping the team know what to expect and to be prepared on how to perform on the day of competition. Also, bookmark this helpful webpage on [Preparing for Competition](#) as a review tool prior to heading off to your Event.

Game Challenge and Rules

The Game Manual Part 1 (usually released in early July) should be read by the team to go over the tournament rules, as well as robot building rules to be prepared for the season ahead. Each year at Kickoff (usually in early September), a new [Game Challenge and Game Manual Part 2](#) will be released, outlining the overall concept of the game, problems to be solved, rules, guidelines, and policies for the *FIRST* Tech Challenge Game. All team members should read both the Game Manuals carefully as soon as possible.

Before diving into the challenge, begin by discussing game rules extensively without referencing robot design at all. Make sure everyone on the team has a good understanding of the game before moving into brainstorming, so that no time is wasted on ideas that may not be permitted or that might be ineffective for the game.

Watch the [Kickoff video released by FIRST](#) several times, but also read the Game Manual very carefully for important details that may be only mentioned briefly in the video. Have both mentors and students read the Game Manual thoroughly and ask questions.

Create a team handbook that outlines all team responsibilities, rules, procedures, and commitments. This will help to ensure that everyone, including parents, understands how the team operates and what the rules are.

A contract can be another effective tool to set expectations. Have everyone outline concise expectations and come to an understanding of what is expected of each member and the team.

Drive Team

- Must wear their badges to be allowed access to the field (if applicable).
- Needs to know where the robot power switch is located.
- Needs to have a plan for who will position the robot on the field and how.

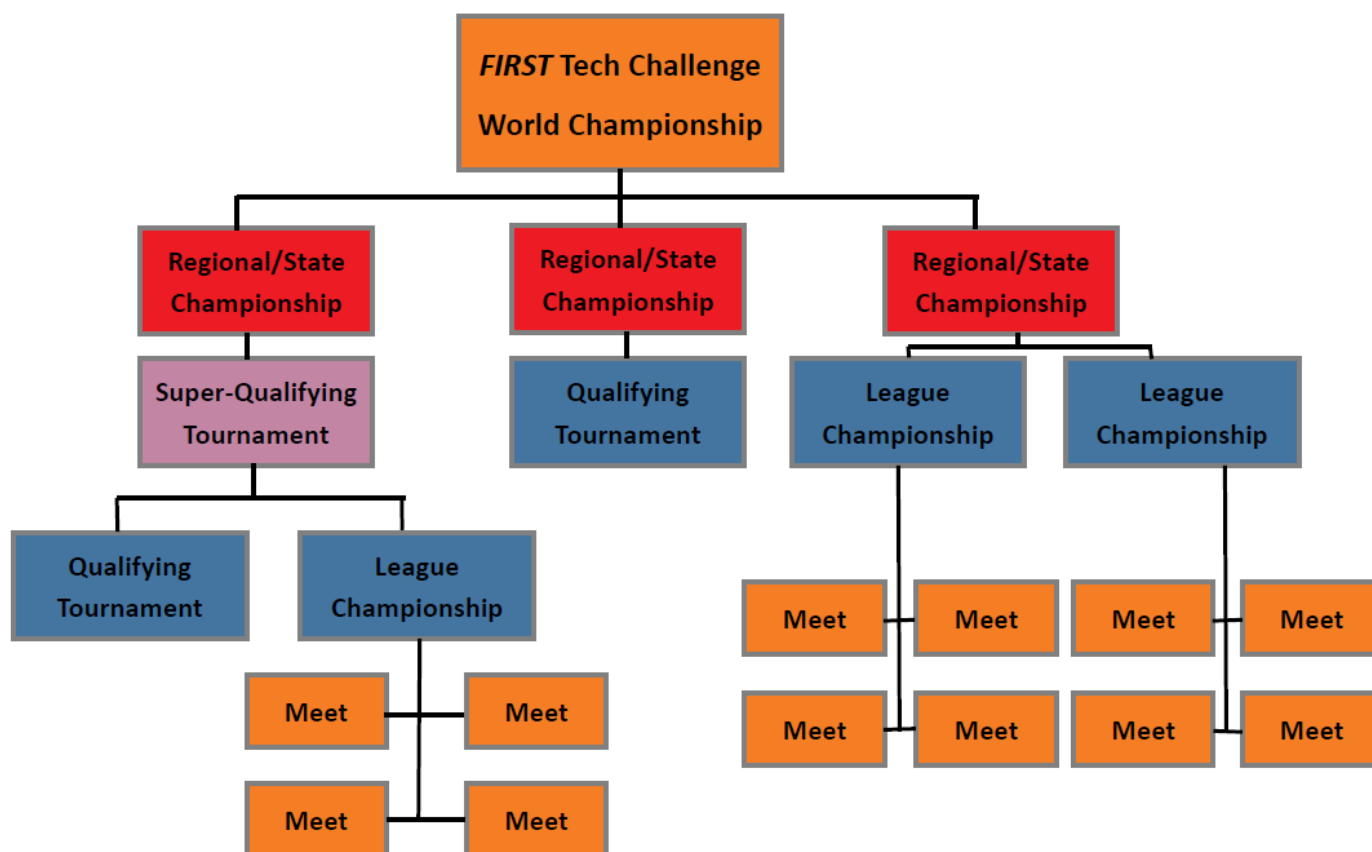


Pit Crew

- Keep the pit area clean and organized so tools are easy to find if/when needed.
- Needs to be prepared for informal Judging conversations should the Judges stop by the pit display.

FIRST Tech Challenge Tournament Structure

The *FIRST* Tech Challenge program is both competition- and merit-based. The tournament structure is tiered with levels of advancement that lead to the World Championships. Teams advance by accumulating ranking points and tiebreaker points received on the field and through Judged Awards. To learn more about the advancement and ranking process, review the [Game Manual Part 1](#).



Types of FIRST Tech Challenge Events

There are many types of *FIRST* Tech Challenge events. Some events are “official”, meaning that they are a part of the advancement structure for the *FIRST* Tech Challenge. “Endorsed” means that the event is not a part of the advancement structure for the program, but the event is hosted by or sanctioned by a *FIRST* Tech Challenge Affiliate Partner or *FIRST* Tech Challenge Headquarters. Other events are “unofficial” and could be hosted by anyone with an interest. Official and endorsed event information provided by the Affiliate Partners is promoted on the [FIRST website](#) and via the @FTCTeams Twitter and Facebook accounts. Unofficial events are not promoted by *FIRST* or *FIRST* Tech Challenge.

The *FIRST* Tech Challenge competition season runs from mid-October to late April and includes several event types. Team saturation generally dictates the number and type of events in a region. Encouraging others to become involved and building the *FIRST* Tech Challenge community is the best way to encourage more events in a region. Read detailed information in [Appendix F: Types of FIRST Tech Challenge Events](#).

Tournament Registration

Most [FIRST Tech Challenge Events](#) are open and free to spectators from the public. Encourage parents, siblings, sponsors, and friends to attend the tournament and to cheer on local teams!

Finding Tournaments

It is the responsibility of the team to find and register for *FIRST* Tech Challenge League, Qualifying, and Championship Tournaments. Events are generally filled on a first-paid, first-served basis and many *FIRST* Tech Challenge Affiliate Partners coordinate their own registration process, so make sure to check the Affiliate Partner's website to determine how the team can apply.



All events (except for the Dual World Championships) must be registered at the local level. You *MUST* contact your Affiliate Partner to compete locally.

There will be a listing of confirmed Championship Tournament sites on the [Events portal website](#) beginning in late September or October. As soon as event registration is open in your region, teams should apply either online or directly with the event organizer.

It is important to note that Championship Tournaments usually require advancement through a Qualifying or League event, and some Championship Tournaments are open only to teams in a specific geographic area. Always check with the Affiliate Partner for the event(s) that determine a team's eligibility to attend.

To receive *FIRST* Tech Challenge updates during the season, be sure that the team's profile and contact information in the Team Registration System is up-to-date and complete before registering for a tournament. Both primary and secondary contact information should be verified for accuracy.

The Event Registration Process

Once the event registration period ends, confirmed teams receive detailed information from the *FIRST* Tech Challenge Partner hosting the event. This information includes specific details about the site, special instructions, forms, and schedule information. Teams can expect to pay a fee to attend a tournament. The tournament coordinators will inform teams about fees and payment procedures.

Contact information for Affiliate Partners in each area can also be found on the [FIRST Regional Contacts portal](#). An outreach can be made to these individuals if tournament information is absent or there are questions. Do not miss an opportunity to compete.

Notes:

- The event schedule may not be complete until the season is well underway. Consequently, the tournament registration process is separate from the online team registration process.
- Due to limited site capacity at some tournaments, registration does not ensure acceptance at an event.
- There is no limit on the number of tournaments in which a team may participate, if space is available. However, participation in the next tournament level is based on the team's performance in its first three tournaments only. This rule applies at all levels of competition.

What to Expect

Tournament Logistics

Once a team has registered for a tournament, it is a good idea to check the tournament website (if applicable) regularly for changes and updates. Every tournament is different in some way. *FIRST* gives latitude to tournament organizers to adjust the format to match their conditions. If there are specific concerns, always double-check with the tournament organizer.

Before the Tournament:

- Confirm event start and end times, parking details, what to bring, food service, and so on.
- Ensure that each team member is registered and has obtained parent consent in the online Youth Team Member Registration System.
- **Any team members lacking the completed registration at the event will be ineligible to participate.**
- Print a team roster in the Team Registration System. Be sure to include any signed Consent and Release forms for students not registered in the Youth Team Member Registration System.
- If travel to a competition is required, follow school or other sponsor's procedures.
- Make sure that each driver is properly insured and that any relevant, completed paperwork, such as school permission slips have been signed and gathered.



Tournament Areas

Registration Area

At the registration table tournament volunteers will collect paperwork, forms, and at some events, the engineering notebooks (check with Tournament Director for exact location where engineering notebooks will be collected). They will tell teams where to find the pit station, the competition area, judging rooms, and where teams can eat lunch (if applicable). They will also give mentors a schedule for their team.

The Pit

The pit will be the team's home for the day. A specific location may be assigned at registration, but some events have areas that are first-come, first-served. Check with the officials to confirm that spectators are allowed in the pit. Some facilities allow only team members, coaches, and mentors in the area. Regardless of the size of the station, be gracious and make sure the team remains within the confines of the allotted space.

Generally, teams will have a table provided in their pit area to set up a display for other teams to see, show off their robot, and make minor repairs. Some, but not all, venues will provide chairs. If the team has any posters or banners, they should be set up to showcase teamwork and team spirit. Bring additional chairs as needed.

Electricity may be provided in the pit, but it is a good idea to make sure that laptops are fully-charged. Some venues have no power other than a few scattered laptop-recharging stations, so plan accordingly. A heavy-duty extension cord and a power strip can be very useful. Be sure to arrive with everything the team needs. Many tournaments send out lists to assist with this.

Read this great blog post and see several pictures of the [FIRST Tech Challenge Pits](#).

Practice Playing Field

Some tournaments provide access to a practice field where teams take turns running matches. Remember to use [Gracious Professionalism](#) when sharing the practice fields with other teams.

Competition Area

The competition area is where the official playing fields, alliance stations, scoring tables, and other tournament officials are located. Matches are played in the competition area based on the match schedule provided to teams the morning of the competition. There will be seating for fans and team members who are not part of the drive team.

Judging Rooms

Generally, but not always, judging takes place in rooms that are separate from the rest of the competition, and occurs before the matches begin. Teams will report to each of these rooms at some point during the day, so make sure that locations and arrival times have been clearly communicated and understood. Always show up a few minutes early for a scheduled interview time. If there is a schedule conflict, inform an event volunteer to ensure Judges can be notified.

What to Expect at an Event

Be flexible, and if there are questions about the day or team schedule, check in with the pit administration or registration table.

Make sure to review the day's schedule with team members. Competition schedules are usually very tight, so it is important to be ready and on time. Do not miss Inspection or Judging Interviews. If the schedule for the day does fall behind, the Tournament Director may juggle a team's Interviews to accommodate the changes. There should be one mentor who focuses on getting to scheduled Judging Interviews and matches on time. Delegate the responsibility of keeping the team together to other volunteers.

Each tournament is a little different, but these basic phases will occur in some form at all tournaments. Pre-season or local events may have some special rules. Check with organizers for detailed information.

General Guidelines for Tournaments

Procedures

- Team members should always inform the coach/mentor when leaving the Pit area (to eat, watch a match, etc.). Employ the "buddy system" where no one wanders off without someone else.
- If DRIVER/COACH designation buttons are provided, always put them in the same place when not being worn by the drive team. **Do not lose them.**
- Label everything with the team name and number. Mark



Some events hold a Coaches' meeting where mentors receive up-to-date information and have an opportunity to discuss any robot rule clarifications.



Be sure to follow your school's field trip policies when attending events.

all batteries and chargers with the team name/number so they are not lost or mixed up at events.

- Have a system to keep track of which batteries are fully charged. (E.g., use a rubber band to designate a battery that has been charged and is ready to use.)
- Create checklists for the Pit crew and other sub-groups on the team to ensure that checks and organizational tasks are completed throughout the day.

Communication

- Mentors and coaches should each have a master list of cell-phone numbers for everyone attending as well as contacts for their Parent/Guardians.
- Use social media and online networking tools for reporting results to parents back home and the team themselves. This can also be useful to communicate between team members at large tournaments.



Well-Being

- Eat when possible. There may not be scheduled lunch breaks.
- Bring healthy snacks and refreshments for team members to keep their energy up (if this is permitted at the venue).
- Make note of any dietary needs or restrictions of team members. Be aware of food allergies or sensitivities and students who may have medical concerns.
- Keep the energy light – encourage laughter and fun.

Documentation

- Try to have one student or mentor videotape matches of play to post on websites, publicize the team, or look back and analyze how good strategy and hardware worked during game matches. Remember that match videos may not be used when asking an event official for a game call clarification or revision.

Technology

- Make sure that virus scans and other background programs are disabled during game play. They can cause lags and lost connections.
- Make sure laptop power saver settings are configured so the laptop never goes into hibernation or sleep mode.
- Reboot the laptop and the Android Technology every few matches.

The Pit

- Have a theme for the team that carries through in Pit decorations, uniforms, and robot designs.
- A 6-foot banner is a cost-effective pit decoration. Make it two-sided, as both sides may be visible.
- Encourage your team to explore other team pits and network.

What to Bring:

- A robot.
- The team [Engineering Notebook](#).
- Any event specific paperwork (i.e. team roster or consent and release forms)
- A first aid kit and a binder containing medical and emergency contact information for all team members.
- Rolling cart for the robot that can easily be disassembled (easier for transport). Reinforce or modify it as necessary. Create an emergency repair kit that stays with the cart during matches.

Gracious Professionalism® - "Doing your best work while treating others with respect and kindness - It's what makes FIRST, first."

- A small box with an assortment of metal parts, brackets, channels, flats, pieces of plastic, or sheet metal for repairs.
- Spare electrical components (motors, servos, motor controllers, servo controllers, sensors) as budget allows. Keep spare fuses in the team toolbox and an emergency repair kit at tournaments.
- Basic tools for repairs.
- Safety glasses and closed-toe shoes.

During Game Matches:

- Keep the pit tools and emergency repair materials organized. Searching will waste time and cause stress.
- During elimination matches, remember that one time-out per alliance can be called for repairs. Check the [Game Manual Part 1](#) for the official length of the time-out.

Supervision and Safety

Adult supervision is a critical factor for a successful tournament. Whether the team is in the pit, moving about the site, competing in a match, make sure that all team members are supervised. Remind each person that the team is expected to demonstrate *FIRST* Tech Challenge values always. This includes mentors and team parents. Inappropriate and/or non-gracious behavior of an adult with the team can jeopardize the team's chances of winning an award or doing well in the alliance selection. Negative adult behavior could also lead to the disqualification of a team during a match and the removal of the adult from the venue.

Remember this is the team's opportunity to shine. Adult interference during the Judging Interview will reflect negatively on the team. A team's inability to answer questions or make robot adjustments without the direct assistance of an adult will be evident to the Judges and may adversely affect the team's score. Remember, the students come first!

It is often difficult for Judges and event organizers to determine if the adults accompanying a team are coaches, parents, or both. Some tournaments have restrictions on the number of adults that accompany students into the interview sessions. Be sure that *FIRST* Tech Challenge's rules on adult intervention and *Gracious Professionalism* have been communicated to all the adults and students accompanying the team. The behavior of one person reflects on everyone associated with the team.

Event Etiquette

Practicing [Gracious Professionalism](#) will ensure everyone has a fun experience, whether or not they win. Here are some easy tips for bringing your *Gracious Professionalism* to the event:

- Mentors need to stay in control of their own emotions. The event can be stressful, but the focus should be on the team members having a great experience. It's hard to do that if the mentor is upset.
- Speak gently and kindly to team members when providing feedback or information always, but especially at events.
- Ensure your team stays within their designated Pit space. Some teams have bigger Pit displays or a larger team, but it is gracious to not invade someone else's space. Asking them to give up space is not gracious, because they may not feel as if they can say "no." Design your display to fit into the designated space.
- Coach all the team members, mentors, and parents on how to cheer in a way that honors everyone and hurts no one.
- Coach team members and mentors on appropriate ways to ask questions, challenge scores, or report issues to event volunteers and staff. Even when upset or stressed, stay gracious.

- When there are disappointments at a tournament, students take their cue from the adults around them. Remember to model *FIRST* Tech Challenge values, honor what the students achieve, and help them to focus on those achievements.

Inspections

At the event, the team should be prepared for a Robot Inspection and a Field Inspection. These inspections can be time-consuming, so it is a good idea to line up at Inspection stations as soon as possible. Teams are encouraged to complete a Robot Inspection Checklist (found in Game Manual Part 1) prior to arriving at the competition. This will ensure a quicker and more efficient inspection process. **Failure to pass any of the inspections will disqualify a team from competition.** However, it is important to know that the Inspector's main goal is to help teams pass.



Robot Inspection

During the robot inspection, Inspectors will examine robot construction against [Robot Inspection Checklist](#). Some examples of a typical hardware inspection items include: the size of the robot, safety standards for the hardware (e.g. no sharp edges or corners), and ensuring the robot contains official build components. The Robot Inspector will also check the robot controller to confirm that it is named appropriately, has the correct Android Operating System installed, and that robot controller app is the default application being used to connect to the core robot modules.

Field Inspection

During the Field Inspection, an Inspector will check to ensure that the team's field setup is correct, the team's robot modes are functional and configured, and that the team understands the match process.

Queuing and Matches

During the day, teams will be scheduled for numerous matches, with the exact number determined by the size of the tournament and the number of attending teams. Teams are responsible for their own schedules, and failure to arrive for a match can result in a loss of points.

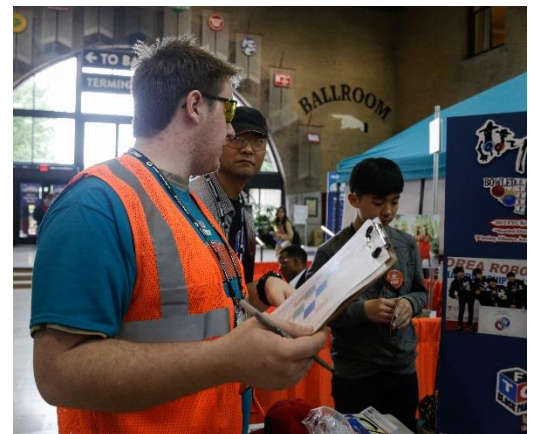
Listen carefully for queue calls. Teams will line up for matches in a designated area. Assign two individuals to listen for queuing calls or watch for match queue runners and keep the team on schedule. Unexpected delays may occur, so remain flexible. Remember that the tournament organizers are volunteers too.

When a match begins, the Driver Team will be on the playing field while mentors get their team settled in the team seating/standing area. Robot operators should follow the Field Manager's instructions on the playing field. Before starting, have them scan the playing field and their robot to make sure everything is set up properly. Once the match starts, team operators may not handle the robot.

Game Play

Each match is made up of three distinct kinds of play. The kinds of play are:

1. Autonomous
2. Driver-Controlled
3. End Game



Autonomous Stage

The autonomous mode of game play is typically a 30-second period in the beginning of a match where the robot's actions are controlled purely by the code created by the team. In this stage, team drivers are not allowed to handle the robot controllers or interact with the robot in any way.

Teams should consider the different starting positions and speculate on ways to make their autonomous mode compatible with their alliance partners.

Driver-Controlled Stage

The Driver-Controlled stage of gameplay is part of the competition where the robot is controlled by the team drivers. In this stage, teams must choose their joystick controls and program their software accordingly. Consider the following tips when approaching planning and programming in this game stage:

- It is a good idea for teams to place a labelled diagram of their joystick controls into their Engineering Notebook. This representation will explain their controls to Judges and provide an easily accessible reference for team members.
- When choosing controls, the team's programmers should approach the problem logically. It is important to remember that choosing controls at random or arbitrarily will make the robot more difficult and increase their driver(s)' training time.
- Consider the kinetics of a driver's hands versus the requirements of the program. How many buttons need to be pressed simultaneously? Is it possible to do several motions at the same time easily?
- It is a good idea to program buttons to select speed levels instead of programming the joysticks to select speed by range of motion. Often, drivers will be caught up in competition and simply "peg" joysticks all the way up or down, spoiling their ability to maneuver when there are fine motor requirements.



The [Drive Team](#) includes 2 drivers, 1 coach, and 1 human player from the same team. Adults should encourage all students to try out these roles prior to competition and then have the team select the three members to fill the roles at the event.

End Game Stage

The End Game stage usually comprises the last 30 seconds of a match. This portion of the competition changes from season to season, but is an opportunity for teams to score a great number of points.

Scoring

As the match is played, Referees will track the status of the match and record each team's score as they accomplish each task. At the conclusion, the Referees will confer to quickly ensure scored points and penalties have been accounted for. This is the official score which will be posted as quickly as possible for the teams and audience to see. Questions about scoring, Referee decisions, and penalties must be brought to the Head Referee within the appropriate allotment of time (see Game Manual 1). All events will have a specific question box area for a student to go to discuss their question. The student should be prepared to calmly and professionally present the team's concerns. The Head Referee will listen to the student's argument and make a final ruling. The Head Referee's ruling on the field is final. It is essential to graciously accept the Head Referee's decision. For game-specific *FIRST* Tech Challenge rules, policies, and practices, please refer to the [Game Manual Part 2](#).

Question Box Etiquette

FIRST Tech Challenge Rules state that only members of the Drive Team can address the Head Referee from the Question Box. Mentors should coach the team on what to expect and how to behave:

- When a team member has decided to ask a question, they should stand in the designated area and wait to be addressed by the Head Referee. This may take a few minutes, so patience is necessary.
- When addressed, present the question or concern as calmly as possible. The Head Referee may need to confer with the Score Tracker, scoresheet, scoring table, or other Referees, so be patient. These volunteers want to ensure they are being as fair and consistent as possible.
- Students are encouraged to bring items such as the Game Manual Part 2, or a specific forum post to show the Head Referee to show specific reasons on why they are questioning a call. This is not required, just encouraged.
- Once the Head Referee delivers a decision or explanation, graciously accept the response or ask an additional clarifying question.
- Learn more in this [helpful video](#).



Your Team should demonstrate *Gracious Professionalism* throughout your Tournament. This includes teams you compete against. Alliances require teams to work closely together. Communication skills, teamwork, and sportsmanship are just as important in Alliance selection as ranking and points accumulated.

Calculating Ranking

Teams at a Tournament are ranked as follows:

1. Average *Ranking Points*; highest to lowest
2. Average *TieBreaker Points*; highest to lowest
3. Highest *Match Score*
4. Random Electronic Draw

All Teams are ranked based on the same number of *Qualification Matches*. Teams may be required to play a *Surrogate Match*, which is an extra *Match* marked by an asterisk on the *Match* schedule. The added *Surrogate Match* does not count towards their standings during the tournament.

At the end of each *Match*, *Ranking Points* and *TieBreaker Points* are awarded:

- Average *Ranking Points* are calculated by adding the *Ranking Points* (2 for a win, 1 for a tie, 0 for a loss, disqualification, or no-show) for each *Match* and dividing by the total number of *Matches* played.
- Average *TieBreaker Points* are calculated by adding the *TieBreaker Points* for each *Match*, then subtracting the lowest scoring *Match* (5-6 *Matches*, one *Match* is subtracted; 7 or more, two are subtracted) and then dividing by the total number of *Matches* played minus the dropped *Match*.
TieBreaker Points are awarded based on the following:
 - The number of *TieBreaker Points* assigned for each *Match* is that of the losing *Alliance's* score. Both *Alliances* receive the pre-penalized score of the losing *Alliance* as their *TieBreaker Points*.
 - If a *Match* ends in a tie, both *Alliances* receive the same number of *TieBreaker Points*, equal to the lowest pre-penalized score.
 - If a *Team* is disqualified or no-show, they receive zero (0) *TieBreaker Points*. This *Match* will not be subtracted as the lowest *Match* score and will count in the *Team's* rankings.
 - If both *Teams* on an *Alliance* are disqualified, the winning *Alliance Teams* are awarded their own pre-penalized score as their *TieBreaker Points* for that *Match*.

Alliance Strategy and Scouting

In tournament play, alliances are important. Teams that have earned wins throughout the qualification matches may earn enough to become an alliance captain team.

Throughout the matches, teams are randomly assigned an ally and an opponent. However, in elimination matches, top-ranking teams choose their own alliance partners. For this reason, it is important that all teams pay close attention to the capabilities and attitude of other teams. If a team has made it to the elimination matches, the selection of a complementary alliance partner is crucial. If a team has not made it to the elimination matches, being selected can provide them with that opportunity.



Alliances are created with the first pick going to the highest-ranked team. After an alliance invitation has been extended, a representative from the other team must come up to accept or decline the invitation. **The only rule of this process is: if a team declines an alliance invitation, it may not be selected by any other alliance.** In this case, the declining team does not lose their right to select if they are an alliance captain.

How to Get Noticed by Alliance Scouts

- Always demonstrate respect and Gracious Professionalism in game play and in the pit area.
- Create a one-page flyer that advertises the robot's capabilities and if possible, its performance record. Bring copies to the tournament and hand them out to other teams and visitors before the qualification matches have been completed.
- Be friendly and sociable with other teams. Compatibility and a positive attitude will linger in other teams' memories.

How to Select an Alliance Partner

- Find a complementary robot to balance strengths and weaknesses in one's own robot.
- Take notes about other teams throughout the day. Track their strengths, weaknesses, strategies for defense or offense, success, and scores. Consider the types of strategies other teams have been using.
- Scouts should also walk around the pits and observe possible capabilities of opponents they have not yet seen play.
- For more ideas and resources, check out the [FIRST Tech Challenge blog post 5 Tips for Scouting](#).

FIRST Tech Challenge Judging and Awards

Why Judging Interviews?

In addition to providing information to help Judges make determinations about award winners, the FIRST Tech Challenge Judging Interview provides an opportunity for teams to practice and develop invaluable life skills. In addition, Judging Interviews and the FIRST Tech Challenge Judged Awards allow teams to be honored and recognized for the complete FIRST Tech Challenge experience and not just the robot and how it performs on the competition field, including:

- The overall team experience, organization, and dynamic
- Robot design, prototype, build, and iteration process
- The team Engineering Notebook
- The team business plan, budget, and funding
- Team and community outreach



Judging is subjective, just like many things in life, but most notably like a job interview.

Teams should look at Judging Interviews as practice for future job interviews and presentations. Mentors can help them prepare by coaching them on developing an elevator speech or pitch, presentation skills, and professional behavior and dress. The following sections go into greater detail about Judging Interviews, preparing the team, and the *FIRST* Tech Challenge awards.

How Judging Works

FIRST Tech Challenge Judges are volunteers. They receive training from *FIRST* Tech Challenge and sometimes additional training from the local *FIRST* Tech Challenge Affiliate Partner before the event. At tournaments, Judges use a set of guidelines that represent qualities the program considers important and useful for evaluating team performance. Judges also refer to a list of judging questions and may even add their own.

During scheduled Interview sessions, Judges will ask questions and team members will need to articulate and demonstrate various aspects of their *FIRST* Tech Challenge experience.

Also, important to the Judges is the team's knowledge of the robot, teamwork, demonstration of *FIRST* Tech Challenge Core Values, as well as the influence of the team's mentors. The focus is on the team members and their ability to express what they have learned.



Usually, teams meet with Judges regarding awards for a designated time. Some Judging is simply observing teams in action. Judges may also evaluate teams during conversations and observations in the pit and competition areas. These informal conversations are an opportunity for Judges to hear unique stories and uncover exceptional qualities not clear during the more formal Judging Interview. The process is not meant to overwhelm the students. Mentors should encourage them to feel comfortable speaking with the Judges.

Preparing and Practicing

Teams will be evaluated by Judges in several ways, including:

- Judging Interviews.
- Observations on the competition field or around the pits.
- Conversations on the competition field or around the pits.

Team members should be prepared for the more formal interview and the informal observation and conversation aspect of Judging. Talk to them about the real-world application of both skill sets and set aside team meeting time for practicing both.

The Elevator Speech

Whenever you have an opportunity to speak about your team or *FIRST*, you're likely going to need to try to explain what it is we do, usually briefly, but that is often easier said than done. However, taking the time to prepare for these impromptu moments will make it less overwhelming when the time comes. To do so, craft an "elevator speech" to review and practice. We looked over the tips created by [Mind Tools](#) and here is what they suggest that you include:

1. Explain What You Do
2. Communicate Your Unique Selling Point
3. Engage with a Question

In addition, you might also discuss the structure of the team, including the spectrum of involvement of the mentors in the various workings of the team, as well as team outreach or goals, and successes.

A great tool is to record individual students practicing explaining the robot to another mentor (or a guest adult), talking about the team's outreach activities, or the overall team experience. Watch the video with the student and coach them on ways they can improve. Often, they will just need to become comfortable with the skill, so allow many opportunities for practice.

An essential tool to help gauge how prepared a team is for Judging at an event is the [Team Judging Session Self-Assessment](#).



Provide every team member with the tools and practice they need to be comfortable speaking during the Judging Interview or to Judges around the competition field and Pit area. Even shy students can be coached to feel confident in speaking a small amount and ALL students should be given the chance to speak on behalf of the team.

Dean's List Award

In an effort to recognize the leadership and dedication of *FIRST*'s most outstanding *FIRST* Tech Challenge students, the Kamen family sponsors an award for selected top students known as the *FIRST* Dean's List. Since its introduction in 2010, the *FIRST* Dean's List Award has attracted the attention of prestigious colleges and universities who desire to recruit *FIRST* Dean's List students. The students who earn *FIRST* Dean's List status are great examples of current student leaders who have led their teams and communities to increased awareness for *FIRST* and its mission while achieving personal technical expertise and accomplishment. *FIRST* Tech Challenge team members are nominated by their Mentor(s) for this award. For more information, read the [FIRST Tech Challenge Dean's List Submission Guide](#) for Mentors and review award criteria.

FIRST Alumni and Scholarship Program

FIRST Alumni

FIRST is committed to remaining a part of our participants' lives well after high school graduation and makes available programs and opportunities for continued *FIRST* Alumni engagement. We also want to see *FIRST* Alumni continuing to give back to *FIRST* as volunteers, coaches, mentors and/or donors. As a Mentor, the most impactful thing you can do for your alumni is to stay involved with their lives – reaching out to say hello or congratulations on a milestone can go a long way toward keeping that alum engaged with your team and *FIRST*!

FIRST Scholarship Program

Participation in *FIRST* provides participants and alumni access to more than \$80 million dollars in [FIRST Scholarship Opportunities](#). Most scholarships that are part of the *FIRST* Scholarship Program are made available by specific colleges or universities for study on their campus, and/or require a major in a specific field (like computer science), but others do not. Students planning on college should start exploring the *FIRST* Scholarship Program early, **as freshmen and sophomores**, and should plan to apply in their junior or senior year (based upon the specific scholarships' requirements). Each year the [scholarship database](#) is updated and added to as the opportunities grow throughout each year, scholarships available for the next academic year begin being posted on September 1st each year and new opportunities are added as late into the spring as April!

FIRST Internship Portal and Alumni Network

Companies who support *FIRST* as sponsors, suppliers, and alliances want to hire *FIRST* Alumni! Open internship opportunities with *FIRST* supporters are available on our [Internship Portal](#), and *FIRST* participants and alumni are encouraged to note their *FIRST* experience when they apply.

The most valuable piece of a student's *FIRST* experience is the connections that they make within the *FIRST* community across the world. *FIRST* Alumni are invited to connect with other alumni as part of our [FIRST Alumni Network LinkedIn Group](#), or connect with local *FIRST* Alumni Groups in their area.

Questions, feedback and ideas are welcome at alumni@firstinspires.org For more information on *FIRST* Alumni and the *FIRST* Scholarship Program, check out the following links:

- [FIRST Scholarship Program website](#)
 - [FIRST Scholarship Blog](#) (subscribe so you never miss out on important information!)
- [FIRST Alumni and Internships webpage](#)
 - [FIRST Alumni Updates Blog](#) (subscribe so you never miss out on important information!)

Celebration and Recognition

Celebrating the End of the FIRST Tech Season

At the end of the *FIRST* Tech Challenge season, team members should be proud of their accomplishments. Team members created a unique machine that they designed, programmed, and built to perform difficult challenges, and they learned how to work together successfully.

It is important to recognize what has been accomplished together. Be sure to think ahead and include a plan for celebration in the schedule. Make some one-on-one time for each team member. Tell each how she/he contributed to the team, and remind them of the great ideas, problems solved, the way each supported teammates, and the things learned during the season. This is an important job as a mentor, so take time and be thoughtful about what is said to each student.

Recognize Team Members

Plan a celebration and invite family and friends to see what the team has accomplished. Ask the team members' school to hold a special assembly, or ask a sponsoring organization to hold a team social where the team can demonstrate its robot and showcase team mementos, journals, or photos.

A certificate presentation could be part of a larger ceremony with the team. Take a picture of each student with his certificate. This ceremony can be held as part of a celebration dinner or pizza party. Whatever it is, make it special!

Tell the group how their accomplishments as a team were special, innovative, or unique. Sometimes it is difficult to say the words, but it is important that the team understands what coaching means to mentors. Recognizing the entire team, as well as praising each student individually in front of his or her teammates, will create a lasting memory of working together on the *FIRST* Tech Challenge.



Recognize Seniors and Outgoing Members

At graduation ceremonies across the country, seniors dressed in caps and gowns are honored for their academic, extracurricular, and athletic successes. We know many of those graduates have accomplished amazing things as part of *FIRST*. Mentors can purchase *FIRST* honor cords to bestow on the graduating seniors. Honor cords are typically given in recognition for academic achievement. They are worn over the graduation robe and the *FIRST* honor cord colors are symbolic of the *FIRST* logo colors and come with a commemorative *FIRST* charm. As they walk across the stage, their cords will stand out as a symbol of their hard work and achievement while a part of *FIRST*. If your school, program, or team would like to honor your graduates, you should first contact your local high school to find out how to be involved. The *FIRST* Tech Challenge honor cords will be available for purchase via the [FIRST website](#).

Additionally, *FIRST* recognizes and connects with all graduating students as *FIRST* Alumni – so please ensure that your team members are registered on the *FIRST* Dashboard and have accurate years of graduation so they don't miss out on the celebration!

Recognize Sponsors, Mentors, and Volunteers

Be sure the team recognizes the contributions of mentors and volunteers at the end of the season. The team can provide its mentor a framed team or robot photograph, or a certificate or letter that recognizes the special talents she or he shared. To give a gift with a *FIRST* logo to volunteers, mentors, or sponsors, visit the [FIRST on-line store](#) for clothing, awards, and other customized items.

Host a Local Event

In the post-season, teams may consider hosting an unofficial local event. Other teams in the area can be invited to attend and participate. This can be done in addition to subsequent *FIRST* Tech Challenge competitions or the Championship event. Visit the [Events section of the FIRST Tech Challenge website](#) for more information.

Hosting an unofficial local event will help team members learn new skills and take more responsibility for their work, as they will be running the event. Students may consider the local event a showcase for their *FIRST* Tech Challenge accomplishments, and they love the opportunity to see what other teams have done with their robots.

Customize local events to suit the team's needs and resources. The flexible format for local events allows for the inclusion of elimination matches, special robot challenges, teamwork activities, and demonstrations of other special components/ subassemblies that the team may have developed. Sometimes host teams participate in the competition, but choose not to be eligible for an award, enjoying it for the experience rather than for competitive reasons. Whatever the team chooses to do, let other participating teams know what they can expect.

Maintaining Team Longevity and Sustainability

Why Longevity and Sustainability?

Some teams are created so that a few students can develop some skills to supplement their school learning. Once the few students either leave or graduate, the team dissolves. Some teams are created for one year and then, due to funding or other reasons, are unable to return. And then other teams are part of a school or organization and the plan is for the team to be around forever. These are just a few examples of the life span of a team, and all are acceptable. The decision to be a short-term or long-term team is personal to the team. However, if your team plans to compete for more than one season, then there are a few things your team can and should do to ensure that the team lasts and can flourish with adequate funding and support. This section of the manual outlines the key elements to maintaining and sustaining your team. For additional information or advice, reach out to other *FIRST* teams in your area or your local [Affiliate Partner](#).

Goal-Setting and Self-Assessment

The first year of a team, the focus is on building a robot that can successfully compete in the Game Challenge. A secondary goal is to learn as much as possible about the *FIRST* Tech Challenge program and connect with other teams.

Each year after the rookie season, the team should establish broader, more challenging goals for that season and beyond, perhaps a three-year plan that is re-visited each year and then re-written every three years. Each year there can be short-term goals, with the team always working toward those longer two- or three-year goals.

Some short-term goal examples:

- Design and build a robot that can _____.
- Train all team members on using Java programming language.
- Advance the team to the regional Championship/World Championship.
- Compete in an international event.
- Raise \$10,000 for the team budget.
- Volunteer 500 hours in their local community.
- Recruit and mentor two other *FIRST* teams.

Some long-term goal examples are:

- Nominate two members for the Dean's List Award each year.
- Advance the team to the World Championship every year.
- Build up a team savings account up to \$30,000.
- Stay in touch with your graduates – they're your future Coaches and Volunteers.
- Get an annual team sponsor.

To maintain interest moving forward each year, keep setting new goals as a team and for individual members. Help the team succeed by establishing checkpoints for the goals and celebrate successes.

Each year, do team self-evaluation, ideally at the end of the season when the experience is still fresh, and then again at the start of the next season when everyone has had a little break that can provide perspective.

Appendix A – Resources

Game Forum Q&A

<http://ftcforum.usfirst.org/forum.php>

Anyone may view questions and answers within the *FIRST*® Tech Challenge Game Q&A forum without a password. To submit a new question, you must have a unique Q&A System User Name and Password for your team.

FIRST Tech Challenge Game Manuals

Part 1 and 2 - <https://www.firstinspires.org/resource-library/ftc/game-and-season-info>

FIRST Headquarters Pre-Event Support

Phone: 603-666-3906

Mon – Fri

8:30am – 5:00pm

Email: Firsttechchallenge@firstinspires.org

FIRST Websites

FIRST homepage – www.firstinspires.org

[FIRST Tech Challenge Page](#) – For everything *FIRST* Tech Challenge.

[FIRST Tech Challenge Event Schedule](#) – Find *FIRST* Tech Challenge events in your area.

FIRST Tech Challenge Social Media

[FIRST Tech Challenge Twitter Feed](#) - If you are on Twitter, follow the *FIRST* Tech Challenge Twitter feed for news updates.

[FIRST Tech Challenge Facebook page](#) - If you are on Facebook, follow the *FIRST* Tech Challenge page for news updates.

[FIRST Tech Challenge YouTube Channel](#) – Contains training videos, Game animations, news clips, and more.

[FIRST Tech Challenge Blog](#) – Weekly articles for the *FIRST* Tech Challenge community, including Outstanding Volunteer Recognition!

[FIRST Tech Challenge Team Email Blasts](#) – contain the most recent *FIRST* Tech Challenge news for Teams.

Feedback

We strive to create support materials that are the best they can be. If you have feedback about this manual, please email firsttechchallenge@firstinspires.org. Thank you!

Appendix B: Season Planning Tool

Coordinating a team over the better part of a year is a lot of work. Make sure all dates and expectations are clear to mentors, volunteers, parents and students. While exact dates and deadlines will vary from year to year, some general timelines will remain consistent between seasons.

Registration (Opens Early May)

Order Parts (May-June)

Pre-Kickoff (August – Early September)

- Attend *FIRST* Tech Challenge events in the area as a spectator to see the flow of the day, meet mentors, talk to teams about their experiences, and witness the high-energy level first-hand.
- Talk to the local [Affiliate Partner](#) to get answers to questions, and to get in touch with experienced mentors in the area.
- Try building practice robots.
- Find another local *FIRST* Tech Challenge team mentor with whom mentors can compare notes, possibly share a playing field, or even set up late-season scrimmages.
- Acquire Java programming software and practice using it. Have a team member start learning to use it.
- Host or support outreach events.
- Attend pre-season workshops, if available.

Kickoff and Game Reveal (Mid-September)

- Access all materials related to the new challenge.
- [Download](#) manuals and graphics, access the rules of the new robot game, and view the season's playing field drawings.
- Contact the [Affiliate Partner](#) for information pertaining to Kickoff events in the local area.
- Many teams gather on that day for a team party to celebrate the new yearly Game Challenge.
- For some teams, this meeting is a season opener.
- Download the materials together and come up with a game plan for the new season.
- Raise team awareness of the build excitement ahead of time and show them where to find information during the build season.
- It is a good idea to start budgeting for event advancement. Some teams receive invitations to [World Championship](#) late in the season and it can be challenging to raise the funds needed in such a short period of time.

Early Season Meetings (September)

- Do lots of teambuilding.
- Establish procedures and routines.
- Get familiar with kits and parts
- Clean up and prepare workspace.
- Inventory resources from previous years.

Build Season (October)

- Teach the team about overall design.

Gracious Professionalism® - "Doing your best work while treating others with respect and kindness - It's what makes *FIRST*, first."



Some regions may have earlier scrimmage and practice opportunities. Consult your local Affiliate Partner/Event Organizer.

- Decide which design to use as a team.
- Programmers get comfortable with the programming software, then create programming flowcharts and begin writing programs for autonomous mode.
- Building team constructs prototypes and then builds the chassis and manipulators.

Practice Season (Late October – November)

- Programmers focus on autonomous mode requirements.
- Drivers practice remote control driving.
- Builders focus on organizing the pit area, assist with testing and driving practice, and enhance the [Engineering Notebook](#).
- Pit crew practices checks and repairs for efficiency.
- The whole team works towards accomplishing all the required tasks for the challenge.
- Try to attend at least one scrimmage to practice under real conditions.

League Events & Qualifying Tournaments (October – February)

- Register for tournaments as early as possible in the season. Pay attention to qualifier requirements. Some tournaments fill up quickly.

Championship Tournaments (December – March)

- There will be a listing of confirmed Championship Tournament sites on the [Events Portal](#), beginning in late September or October. Teams can apply either online or directly with the tournament organizer for most Championship Tournaments.

World Championships (April)

Post-Season (May – June)

- Organize post-season events.
- Celebrate end of the season.
- Get an early start on next season's registration (useful for schools using current year budget funds).

Recruitment Season (June – July)

- Some areas hold outreach events, which include demos or scrimmages to attract new teams.
- Outreaches are a good opportunity to keep team members together and engaged for a longer season.

Appendix C: Sample Team Roster

Team Member Roster

(Maximum Student Participates is 15)

Team Information

Program:	FIRST Tech Challenge	Season:	2015
Team Number:	XXXX	Team Location:	City, State/Province, Postal Code Country
Team Name:	Team Name	Team Nickname:	Team Nickname
Team Location:	City, State/Province, Postal Code Country		

Main & Alternate Team Contacts

Role	Name	Phone	E mail	Consent Form Status	Consent Form Date Complete
Main	Firstname Lastname	W: 555-555-5555	email@domain.com	Accepted	04/01/2015
Alternate	Firs tname Lastname	W: 555-555-5555 H: 555-555-5555	email@domain.com	Accepted	05/06/2015

Mentors & Other Team Contacts

Role	Name	Phone	Email	Consent Form Status	Consent Form Date Complete
------	------	-------	-------	---------------------	----------------------------

Student Team Members

Role	Team Member Name	Parent Name	Application Status	Consent Form Status	Consent Form Date Complete
Student	firstname lastname	Firstname Lastname	Accepted	 Incomplete	
Student	firstname lastname	Firstname Lastname	Accepted	Accepted	06/29/2015

Additional Student Team Members and Mentors Not Listed Above (write in)

[illegible]

All students MUST have a completed Consent & Release form, either online or printed in order to participate at an event.

Appendix D: FIRST® Tech Challenge Sample Budget

The sample budget on our website was created for a rookie team, and costs reflect one-time purchases for their robot and one event. Adding additional supplies and event registration and travel will cost more. Teams should anticipate some of the costs as they are planning their budget and fundraising. This is targeted toward rookie teams who are looking at what to expect their first year participating in FIRST® Tech Challenge. For team longevity, teams will want to end the season with some surplus, if possible, to help get them started in the next season. [Download a copy](#) of this budget and use it as a template to craft your own budget.

At the start of the season, create a budget that guesstimates expenses. Using the template, put anticipated expenses and the projected amount in the column named “Budgeted Amt.: As money gets spent, track the line items and the actual dollar amount in the column labelled “Actual Cost”. For teams who need to report their budgets out for awarded grants, sponsors, or schools, you might need to use the “Category” and “Rationale” columns to separate out how each expense is applied and the purpose for it. For the full list of kits of part options, [visit our website](#).

Ways to Reduce Expenses for Rookies

The sample budget is planned for a rookie team purchasing the maximum amount of supplies through the FIRST Tech Challenge Storefront and attending two tournaments. Reductions in this budget could include:

- Borrow tools – about \$200 savings
- Reduce extra parts and supplies needs with frugal robot design – about \$200 savings
- Don’t buy Team Swag (T-shirts or Pit display) – about \$200 savings

Total potential savings: about \$600 if all above measures were combined.

Ways to Reduce Expenses for Veterans

The sample budget is planned for a rookie team purchasing the maximum amount of supplies through the FIRST Tech Challenge Storefront and attending one Tournament Event.

Reductions in this budget could include:

- Don’t buy a new Kit of Parts - about \$532 savings
- Use old tools – about \$200 savings
- Reduce extra parts and supplies needs with frugal robot design – about \$200 savings
- Use previous T-Shirts and Pit display – about \$200 savings
- Parents donate gas, travel expenses, and food – about \$300 savings

Total potential savings: about \$1,432 if all above measures were combined.

Optional Costs

Many teams want to build and test their robots using off-the-shelf materials and a real playing field. This is, however, totally up to the team and what they can afford but will increase their expenses throughout the season. Example expenses include:

- **FIRST Tech Challenge Playing Field Perimeter** – approximately \$700 (or you can save money by building one using the Low-Cost Field Perimeter Build Guide).
- **FIRST Tech Challenge Playing Field Tiles** – approximately \$360 for a full field (or you can save money by only buying a few tiles, like 6, to practice on).

- **FIRST Tech Challenge Field** – a full field will cost \$450, or you can save money by buying just a partial field for \$300, or just a few of the field elements with varying costs by part (or you can save money by building a field using the *FIRST* Tech Challenge DIY Field Build Guide and Blueprints. This can be found on our [Season Game Page](#)).

Appendix E: *FIRST*® Tech Challenge Team Roles

Below is a list of potential roles that individuals can serve on a *FIRST* Tech Challenge team. These serve as suggestions and a starting point when developing your team. An individual can take on multiple roles; however, be sure that a single individual does not take on too many. Sharing responsibilities is great teambuilding and creates a stronger sense of team identity.

FIRST Tech Challenge Team Roles	
Responsibilities	Traits
Mentor (2+ adults)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read about the Mentor's Role. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 years or older • Patient • Dedicated • Willing to learn
Future Mentor (1+)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist the mentor and other team members. • Gradually take on responsibilities as the season progresses, to assist the mentor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receptive to feedback and coaching • Actively seeks challenge and greater responsibility • Goal-oriented • Willing to assume responsibility for his or her own growth and development
Team Management (1+ students)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses the team. • Ensures that everyone's ideas are heard and works to find compromises. • Regularly checks team goals and deadlines. • Gathers information from sub-groups on the team and tracks team progress. • Keeps everyone on schedule with project timelines. • Manages the team schedule at events. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear-headed • Organized • Confident • Punctual • Able to mediate discussion and conflict

Responsibilities	Traits
Strategy (2+ students)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discusses ways to help the team be successful in competition. • Understands the game rules and challenges thoroughly. • Gathers input from other team members to influence strategy. • Keeps an active eye for rule updates to ensure team compliance. • Searches the Internet for discussion by other teams regarding what works. • Studies the team's robot to see other ways it can do different tasks with little modification. • Communicates problems and possible solutions clearly and respectfully with team members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resourceful • Creative • Innovative • Willing to take well-thought-out risks • Knows the related subject matter • Familiar with rules and regulations
Build Team (2+ students)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands and uses safety precautions while building. • Investigates different solutions to solve mechanical design challenges. • Makes decisions about mechanical design. • Works to achieve consensus among team members. • Uses guidelines from team brainstorming to build a robot. • Communicates and tests to ensure that all mechanisms on the robot work effectively together. • Works with the Quality/Compliance Control team to test and refine robot design. • Communicates problems and possible solutions clearly and respectfully with team members. • Regularly monitors forums and <i>FIRST</i> resources for rule updates, to ensure team compliance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows the related subject matter • Confident, but willing to ask for clarification • Documents carefully • Confident with use of all tools • Familiar with rules and regulations

Responsibilities	Traits
Programming Team (2+ students)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writes well-commented programs for the autonomous part of the competition. Schedules time with the build team to test the chassis when others do not need it. Alters the programs as necessary. Regularly monitors forums and <i>FIRST</i> resources for rule updates, to ensure team compliance. Communicates problems and possible solutions clearly and respectfully with team members. Ensures there is a hard copy of the program at events. At events, makes any changes the drive team needs to be more efficient during the controlled portion of the match. If the team is experienced, aids team members that are new to programming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organized and has good tracking skills. Creative Innovative Willing to take risks based on thorough research Knows the related subject matter Familiar with rules and regulations
Quality/Compliance Control (2+ students)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regularly monitors forums and <i>FIRST</i> resources for rule updates, to ensure team compliance. Conducts independent tests of the robot's performance to identify potential problems and areas for improvement. Tests for functions that do not work reliably. Makes recommendations for improvements. Communicates problems and possible solutions clearly and respectfully with other team members. Documents all tests and results in the Engineering Notebook. <p>Note: Robots and programs will need to be tested and revised frequently and regularly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detail-oriented Thorough Innovative Documents carefully Confident, but willing to ask for clarification Knows the related subject matter Authoritative yet diplomatic

Responsibilities	Traits
Hardware/Tools Management (2+ students)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands the function of hardware elements and tools in the kit. • Organizes and monitors the use and location of all hardware and tools needed for building and maintaining the robot. • Keeps track of all wiring necessary to program the Robot. • Keeps track of all power strips and batteries needed for the robot. • Manages the battery charging process. • Understands and uses safety precautions when using and storing materials, and when charging batteries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized • Responsible • Uses appropriate terminology
Pit Crew (2+ students)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates safety and robot functionality checklists throughout the build season, to be used at scrimmages and competition events. • Conducts thorough safety and robot functionality checks regularly at all events. • After each match, ensures that all nuts and bolts are tight, that metal is not bent or impairing motion, and that all wires are still firmly attached. • Ensures that all materials and tools used for repair are accounted for and returned to the appropriate location after game play. • Understands and uses safety precautions always in the pit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized • Confident with use of all tools • Works well under pressure • Communicates calmly and effectively with team members
Driver (2+ students and 1 backup driver)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operates the robot in competition using a hand-held remote control to “drive” or move a part of the Robot. <p>Note: Backup robot operators should be trained and prepared to take part in the competition, in case of illness or nerves. Practice time should include both groups, so everyone is prepared to play in front of a loud, enthusiastic audience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive attitude • Able to focus in loud, distracting environment • Attentive listener • Receptive to receiving input from Driver Coach • Dedication to practice time

Responsibilities	Traits
Driver Coach (1+ students) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourages the student members of the teams to collaborate on match strategy In game play, watches for information from Referees and communicates with the drive team Assists the drive team in following the predetermined strategy or changing it, if necessary <p>Note: Coaches cannot touch the controllers or robot before or during a competition match. Doing so will lead to a disqualification of the entire team.</p>	
Speaking Representative (2+ students) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead the group when talking to Judges, scouts, or guests in the Pit during competition. Promote <i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge and their team by speaking at community outreach events or team demonstrations. Understand each team member's role to direct more specific questions to those individuals when necessary. <p>Note: The spokesperson may be the most prominent speaker, but all team members should be prepared to speak about their robot and experience in general, and about their own roles on the team in detail.</p>	
Team Spirit (whole team with 3+ student specialists) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps to establish and promote team identity and spirit. Helps to promote a positive attitude and <i>Gracious Professionalism</i>® throughout the season and at Events. Thinks of ways for the team and its supporters to show their spirit and personality at events. Assists in the design of T-shirts or pins Writes cheers and invents unique ways to showcase team spirit. Encourages the drive team to do its best during game play and cheers whether the team wins or loses. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calm Clear verbal communicator Understands team strategy and game rules 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confident Polite Good listener Professional manner Able to speak loudly and clearly over noise and distraction Understands and uses appropriate terminology Speaks clearly and concisely 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enthusiastic Creative Positive attitude Receptive to input from the team regarding spirit ideas 	

Responsibilities	Traits
Documentation (whole team with 2+ student specialists)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Records and documents the team's activities, actions, failures, and successes in the Engineering Notebook. Takes photos or video footage of build process and events for use in marketing and outreach efforts. <p>Note: All team members should contribute to documentation in some way, especially in the Engineering Notebook.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creative Written communication skills Visual presentation skills Detail-oriented Interested in layout and presentation
Marketing (1+ student)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designs and creates the team logo. Assembles promotional materials to showcase team capabilities. Visits sponsors and potential sponsors. Regularly updates parents and sponsors about the team's progress. Publicizes the team in the school and community (e.g., displays, pictures of the team in action, press releases, social media, or a team web site). Contacts the local media, surrounding schools, or civic organizations to increase public awareness of the team and how students benefit from the <i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge experience. Creates and shares promotional materials with other teams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creative Outgoing Organized Resourceful Strong communication skills Professional manner
Fundraising (2+ students)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Searches for unique and effective fundraising ideas. Recruits parents and other students to assist in the fundraising process. Monitors money and ensures that it is submitted on time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible Innovative Detail-oriented Experience handling money
Recruitment (2+ students)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote <i>FIRST</i> in school and local community Works to bring new and varied members to the team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outgoing Personable Enthusiastic Professional manner Speaks clearly and concisely

Appendix F: Types of FIRST® Tech Challenge Events

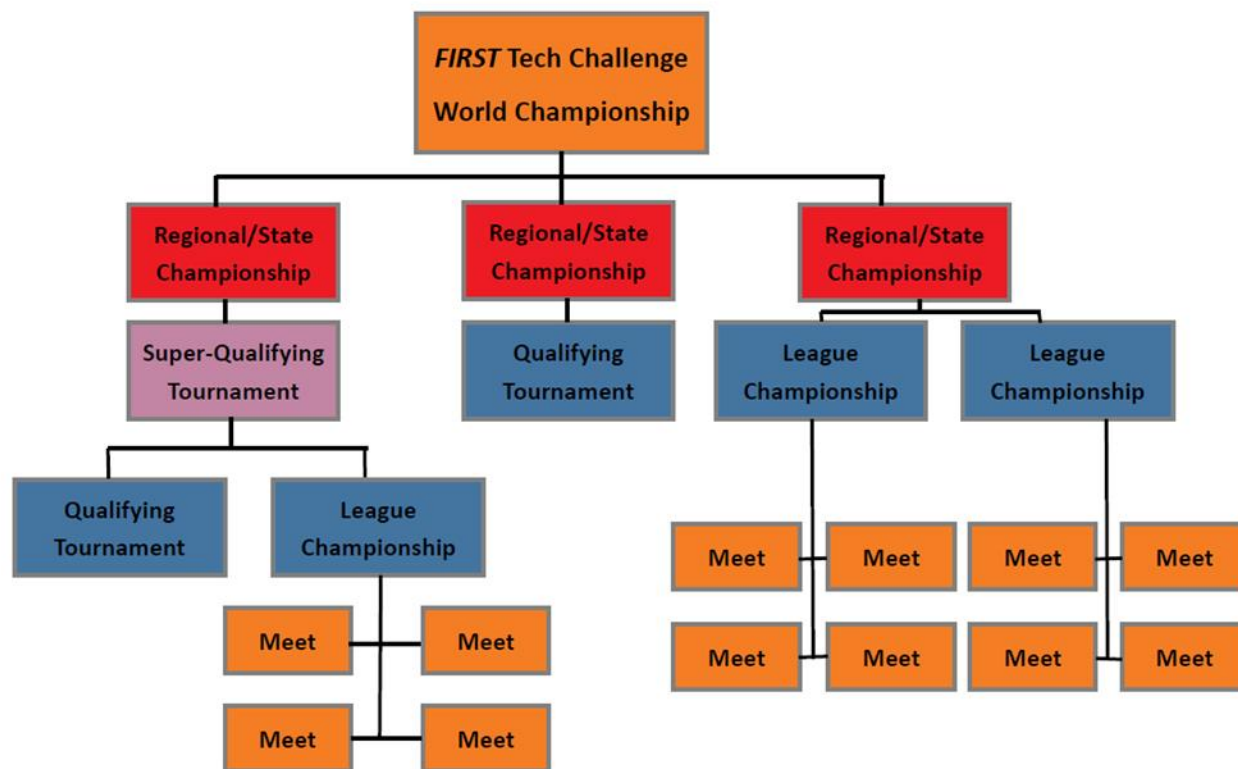
There are many types of FIRST Tech Challenge events. Some events are “official”, meaning that they are a part of the advancement structure for the FIRST Tech Challenge. “Endorsed” means that the event is not a part of the advancement structure for FIRST Tech Challenge, but the event is hosted by or sanctioned by an Affiliate Partner or FIRST Headquarters. Other events are “unofficial” and could be hosted by anyone with an interest. Official and endorsed events will have information provided by the local Affiliate Partner and is often promoted on the FIRST website and via the @FTCTeams social media accounts. Unofficial events are not promoted by FIRST or the FIRST Tech Challenge Headquarters.

Unofficial or Endorsed Events

Type of Event	Description of Event
Scrimmages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These are unofficial practice tournaments. They are usually held early in the season to practice against real competitors with the season’s new game. They often serve as practice sessions for Referees and officials who are learning a game that has never been played before.
Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These are events which are often conducted by local Affiliate Partners or experienced teams. They usually involve sessions on technical and non-technical topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical topics could include: JAVA programming, PTC software, and mechanical design. Non-technical topics could include: Fundraising, Team Organization, and Tournament Day Preparation.
Practice Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some organizers hold events early in the season, combining a morning help session with an afternoon scrimmage. If a Practice Day is held in a team’s area, it is a good opportunity to obtain assistance from veteran teams and mentors, especially if the team is facing significant challenges. The goal of a Practice Day is to have all attending teams competing, in some fashion, in the afternoon mini-scrimmage.

Official Events

- FIRST Tech Challenge Affiliate Partners and volunteers plan, coordinate, and run the competitions.
- Most events have opening and closing ceremonies, trophies and/or medals, teams with personalized T-shirts, hats, banners, and even some costumes. One major exception is League Meets, which have a different set of standards for what they can and must include.
- Teams are recognized for excellence in various aspects of the Challenge and associated teamwork through Judge Awards or through competition.
- Event types vary from region to region. Some regions participate in Leagues, while others do not. Some regions will have Super-Qualifiers, while others do not. The advancement structure chart below will demonstrate the various possibilities for advancement depending on the region.
- The advancement structure does require teams to win at a Qualifying, Super-Qualifying, or League Championship to advance to a Regional/State Championship (see chart below).



Event Descriptions

Type of Event	Description of Event
League Meets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meets are like a traditional sporting event. Teams compete in smaller, more frequent competitions to gain points that will advance them to the next level tournament play. If your region has chosen to participate in the League format, some of the standard tournament and championship guidelines may be modified. For information about the scheduling, structure, advancement and processes that are unique to the league program and events in your region, please contact your local Affiliate Partner.
League Championship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teams in the League format compete in meets that culminate in the League Championship. Format is like qualifying tournaments: opening/closing ceremonies, judging interviews, and competition play.
Qualifying Tournaments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These events follow judging guidelines and a similar format to Championship Tournaments, but have some flexibility in format and awards. There may be anywhere from one to twelve winning teams from these tournaments advancing to a region's Championship Tournament.

Type of Event	Description of Event
Super-Qualifying Tournament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These events are held in regions with many teams and/or leagues. • In these regions, teams advance from either a League Championship or Qualifying Tournament to a Super-Qualifying Tournament, and then to the Regional or State Championship. Super-Qualifying Tournaments follow <i>FIRST</i> standards in format, judging, and awards. • For information about the scheduling, structure, advancement and processes that are unique to the super-qualifier program and events in your region, please contact your local Affiliate Partner.
Regional Championship Tournament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Regional- or State-level event. • For many teams and regions, a Championship tournament is the highest level of <i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge tournament participation. • Championships may include teams from a geographic region, province, state, country, or several countries. • Teams in the U.S. will advance from Regional/State Championship tournaments to the World Championships based on the advancement criteria outlined in the Game Manual Part 1. • These tournaments abide by specific standards in format, judging, awards, and overall quality. • If applying for a Championship Tournament, determine whether the team needs to attend a Qualifying or Regional Tournament first by checking the tournament information. Be sure to confirm the criteria that determine advancement to the Championship Tournament.
<i>FIRST</i> Sponsored <i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge World Championship Tournament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge World Championship events, held in conjunction with the <i>FIRST</i> Championship, <i>FIRST</i>® LEGO® League World Festival, and <i>FIRST</i>® LEGO® League World Expo, is a global celebration of <i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge teams from around the world. • The selection process for the World Championship event may change from year to year, depending upon the number of spaces available and the number of teams participating in <i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge. • Teams earn an advancement through the regional championship tournament that serves their area. <p>Note: Check out the World Championship webpage to learn more about the upcoming event and find previous World Championship results.</p>

Appendix G: *FIRST* and *FIRST* Tech Challenge Promotional Materials

Hand-Outs

- [Game 1-Page Document](#)
- [FIRST Tech Challenge Promotional Flyers, Posters, and handouts](#)

Media and Press Tools

- [FIRST Marketing and Press Tools](#)
- [FIRST Tech Challenge Outreach and Marketing Resources](#)

Presentation Materials

- [FIRST Tech Challenge PowerPoint Presentation template](#)
- [What's FIRST? video](#)
- [FIRST Tech Challenge Promo video](#)
- [Game Animation video](#) - changes each season
- [Gracious Professionalism video](#)
- [FIRST Scholarship Video](#)
- [Youth Protection Program video](#)