

welcome to The Competition

6th Annual

The suggestions provided in this document are designed to assist you in developing your team for The Competition. This information has been gathered from both rookie and veteran team participants but is not part of the official rules. Remember, not all teams are identical, and what worked for one may not work for all. Read this through, see if any of the ideas will work for you, and if you need more information, please call FIRST for help.

building your Team

start Now

Our teams have provided us with the best advice—start now. We have heard many times from teams that getting people from diverse areas on board early saved time later on.

involve as Many People as possible

Involve as many individuals as you think your team can manage. If you must select only a portion of the students who show interest, remember that one of the strengths of The Competition experience is that it often has a very positive effect on students who are not usually attracted to this type of a program.

share the Excitement

Work with your team partner to recruit team members from both your company/university partner and team school. Call FIRST for information packets, event programs or articles from the national press and set up an information table in the corporate cafeteria or at a staff meeting. We also have videos of past Competitions which are sure to get others excited, and involved.

take the time to Explain

Many of our team members were surprised to hear: "This is the first time I've ever built something," "I now know what torque is!" or "Explain in English—not engineering—what you just said." Some of the students you work with may never have set foot in a machine shop or used a small hand tool. For the first time many will see how their math and science classes are applicable to "real world" situations. In order to engage the students, be prepared to explain complicated concepts and formulas at a level students will comprehend.

develop a Team Attitude

Many of our team members have commented that the design-and-build phase of The Competition is the most intensive work time they have ever spent. To help things run smoothly, many start at the beginning of the school year with Team Building Workshops that include student, teacher and corporate team members. Some teams practice brainstorming using the previous year's game. This also served to recruit new team members and renew the interest of those already signed on.

begin Computer Training now

Learning computer programs ahead of time—CAD-CAM, drafting or drawing—can also be helpful by speeding up design of the machine and keeping the cost of "testing" prototypes within budgets.

develop sources of Support

Parents

Inform parents about the program by sending home information from FIRST and the school. Include them in your recruiting meetings or have the students make presentations on the team's progress. Open houses or family days at the school or work facility are a great opportunity to introduce parents to the project. Permission forms may also be helpful—a sample form is enclosed in this packet—feel free to tailor it to your needs.

School

Include teachers from outside the science and math departments. Art classes can help design team logos, computer instructors can teach programs, and the shop or tech ed teachers are valuable resources for everyone. Some schools even have their own television studios and in-house broadcast facilities; use them to help recruit team members by showing videos of The Competition or student-produced documentaries of your progress.

Involve the school administration. Permission slips, insurance issues, and school district clearance are sometimes necessary to allow the students to travel off-site for working on the machine or for the tournaments. The administration can also facilitate open houses, school assemblies, pep rallies, and facilities for meeting or working.

Community

Other team needs, such as fundraising and carpools, may be fulfilled by community members—parents, aunts, uncles, small (and large!) business owners. Students in the same neighborhood can arrange for carpools for travel to and from the work site. Local businesses can assist with donated "fuel" for long work sessions—pizza and doughnuts are always popular. Teams come to The Competition in uniform—team T-shirts, hats and buttons can be supplied by local merchants. Create a team of students to organize fund-raisers and recruit support.

planning for Success

use real-world Business Models

Some successful teams have used a corporate model to organize their efforts. Vision and mission statements, strategic goals, time frames and team responsibilities were outlined, documented and distributed. Some teams even created—and named—model, mini-corporations complete with design, manufacturing, marketing and budget departments. Even if your team doesn't go to this extent, teams within a team have worked very well.

divide Responsibilities

Job descriptions, applications and interviews may allow team members to choose their areas of interest and help team organizers assign responsibilities. Teams may be divided into groups to accomplish specific tasks and keep each other abreast of their progress.

communicate

Come up with a system to keep everyone—including parents—involved and informed of rules changes, travel plans, upcoming meetings, and project progress. For example, one veteran team set up an information line through the corporation's phone system—any interested party could dial in and find out the latest news.

acquire Facilities

Find a place early where you can set up shop, have meetings and work on the vehicle. Also, learn the procedures for acquiring materials or having shipments delivered to your work site. If permission, keys, or badges are required for access, get clearance now for all team members to enter facilities. You will not have time during the design and build phase to address these issues.

document your effort: the Chairman's Award

The Competition also offers students with diverse interests and talents to be involved by documenting your team effort for the benefit of all: team members, parents, school members, and the Chairman's Award.

The Chairman's Award is presented to the team which demonstrates the most outstanding partnering effort while seeking to fulfill the goals of FIRST. Specific criteria for the award will be available with the Rules at the Kick-Off, however, components of partnerships include student involvement, sportsmanship, effort and overall cooperation and effectiveness between school and team partner(s). The national judging panel reviews materials submitted by teams prior to the National Championship. Documentation may consist of video footage, photos, and written chronicles. Many critical things happen in the off-season or in the beginning when you are just forming your partnership. Document these too since it's important to show the process of forming your team.

traveling

If you have to choose who will travel and who will stay behind, come up with a plan for making those decisions: will it be based on who can pay? an essay contest? review by a student panel? Remember: as a coach you do not have to make these decisions alone. Ask the students to decide on a plan—their sense of diplomacy will surprise you.

Be clear about your expectations of those who make the trip. Talk about acceptable behavior, team spirit, and good sportsmanship. Be ready to handle emergencies and report good news back home quickly.

spread the Word

Spreading the word among team members and their extended families about your FIRST team is a good start. But, think **BIG!** Promote your involvement both internally and externally. Use newsletters to recruit team members, a cheering section or new supporters. Have your school board members, administrators, town or city mayor or corporate CEO visit your work site and get the local papers and television stations involved. Again, have students assist your corporate public or community relations staff and broaden the type of role models you can provide.



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