FIRST® Leadership Award Reviewer Manual

Revision History	
Revision	**Description**
V25-26.1	Initial 2025-26 Release
V25-26.2	• Replaced "Dean's List Award" with "*FIRST* Leadership Award" throughout document • Replaced "Dean's List Award System" with "Judges Portal" throughout document

Contents

Overview

Roles Covered: *FIRST* Leadership Award Reviewer

Job Description

The *FIRST* Leadership Award Reviewers are responsible for selecting the *FIRST* Leadership Award finalists. They must evaluate students who have been nominated for the *FIRST* Leadership Award by reviewing the student nomination essay, reviewing the *FIRST* Leadership Award Interviewer notes, and select their regions finalists.

Requirements	
Technical	Medium
Physical	Low
Administrative	High
Communication	High
Pre-event Training	High

Time Commitment

A *FIRST* Leadership Award Reviewer should expect 3-4 hours to read the nominations and select the region finalists. Approximately 1-2 hours of pre-event training and planning is required.

Training and Certification

Read and complete all tasks listed in the `Pre-Event Training` section.

Any volunteer who applies to a role will be able to get into the Learning Management System (LMS) using the *'FIRST* Training' button. Roles with the training required will appear in the 'roles missing certification' area.

If you have applied for a role but have not received access to the training, please email training@firstinspires.org. A separate confirmation of the role assignment will come later.

FIRST Leadership Award Reviewers should speak to the Program Delivery Partner to find out what additional requirements are, such as setting up meetings with fellow Reviewers. The approximate training time is 1-2 hours.

All volunteers are expected to read and comply with the Volunteer Handbook.

Roles and Responsibilities

> *FIRST* **is fun for all.** The most important role of a volunteer is to provide a safe, fun, and welcoming environment for all *FIRST* participants. When executing the duties of your role, always make decisions with the team experience in mind. Ask for help from event leadership if you feel your required duties conflict with the best team experience.

FIRST Leadership Award Reviewer

There will be at least two Reviewers in a region that work together to determine the finalists for that region. The Reviewers must access the [Judges Portal](#) to view the original nomination as well as the notes from the *FIRST* Leadership Award Interviewers. Once all the nominations and notes have been considered, the reviewers are responsible for choosing the finalist students to be announced at the regional championship. *FIRST* Leadership Award Reviewers do not need to be present at the event; rather they review each semi-finalist and enter the finalists in the Judges Portal. This information will feed up to the regional championship Event Director.

Prerequisites for *FIRST* Leadership Award Reviewer

To serve as a *FIRST* Leadership Award Reviewer:

- must be 21 years of age or older

Managing Conflicts of Interest

> **Conflict of Interest** – a conflict between the private interests and the official responsibilities of a person in a position of trust.

All listed volunteer roles will be asked to disclose any potential Conflicts of Interest, and to complete the [Conflict of Interest and Disclosure form.](#) During the Judges meeting, Judges will be asked to declare any potential conflicts to the rest of the judging pool. During the Referee meeting, Referees will be asked to declare any potential conflicts to the rest of the referee team. Some scenarios of conflict of interests:

- A coach/mentor volunteers as a judge or a referee.
- A parent/relative of a team member volunteers as a judge or a referee.
- A recent alum (student or adult) of a team competing at the event volunteers as a judge or a referee.
- A sponsor of a team competing at the event volunteers as a judge or referee.

Having a Conflict of Interest, or even the perception of a Conflict of Interest can affect a team's experience, even if decisions that were made throughout the day were not biased in any way. The perception of potential favoritism is enough to discourage a team, coach, or mentor, and take away from their overall experience at an event. Knowing what Conflict of Interest is, and how to avoid being in a position that could be a conflict will ensure all teams feel they have been evaluated fairly.

> All volunteers at an event have a fiduciary responsibility to act in the best interest of the event which means to treat all teams fairly and equitably.
>
> Volunteers should use prior *FIRST* experience to help inform their decisions but should not use prior knowledge or perception of any specific team to inform their decisions either good or bad. Every team, at every event, deserves a fresh blank slate with all volunteers.

A volunteer who does not disclose their conflict of interest can compromise the integrity of *FIRST* Tech Challenge events. In judging, this could cause teams affiliated with the volunteer with a Conflict of Interest to be removed from consideration for awards.

Conflict of Interest, in some cases, can be quite easy to see. In other cases, it may be less obvious, and it may be difficult to decide what constitutes a true Conflict of Interest. In some cases, the bias may be apparent, while other times a Conflict of Interest may be perceived by a team or a coach. It is best to keep the following in mind when volunteering:

- Be open and forthcoming about any conflicts you may have with a team competing at the event.
- If there is a known Conflict of Interest, avoid making decisions about a team that would change the outcome of the day, such as speaking for or against a team in judge deliberations, or holding some teams to a different refereeing standard than others.
- Remove yourself from any situation that could be perceived as a Conflict of Interest.

Below is one example of a Conflict of Interest. Keep in mind this is an example, and there are many forms of Conflict of Interest, and ways to handle it.

Parent/Relative/Alumni of a Team

If a parent or a relative of a team member, or an alum of a team is volunteering at an event, this volunteer must abstain from making any decisions that could affect the results of the tournament. Whether volunteering as a judge or as field personnel (referee, field technical assistant, etc.) it is important to have that volunteer remove themselves from making any decisions related to that team. For example:

- If the volunteer is a judge, they must recuse themselves from any conversations about that team during deliberations.
- If the volunteer is a referee, they should not be involved in any decisions around penalties, match replays, etc.
- Keep in mind that there are many ways Conflict of Interest can be presented, from parents to sponsors. Make sure to remove any apparent Conflicts of Interest but also keep in mind any perceptions of conflicts.

What is the *FIRST*® Tech Challenge Leadership Award?

The *FIRST*® Leadership Award recognizes the dedication and individual contributions of outstanding secondary school students participating on *FIRST* Tech Challenge or *FIRST* Robotics Competition teams. Students in 10th or 11th grade are eligible to be nominated by their team for the *FIRST* Leadership Award for excelling in areas such as leadership, entrepreneurship, and dedication to advancing the mission of *FIRST* within their communities. There are three (3) levels of *FIRST* Leadership Award students.

1. *FIRST*® **Leadership Award Semi-finalists** – comprised of the two (2) students in their 10th or 11th school year nominated by each team.
2. *FIRST*® **Leadership Award Finalists** - The students selected for each regional championship.
3. *FIRST*® **Leadership Award Winners** - comprised of the ten (10) *FIRST* Robotics Competition and ten (10) *FIRST* Tech Challenge students selected from the applicable *FIRST* Leadership Award Finalists.

The students who earn *FIRST* Leadership Award status as either a Semi-finalist, Finalist or Winner, are great examples of student leaders who have led their teams and communities to increased awareness for *FIRST* and its mission, champion *FIRST* Core Values such as Inclusion, and embody *Gracious Professionalism*®. It is the goal of *FIRST* that *FIRST* Leadership Award Winners will continue, post-award, as great leaders, student alumni, and advocates of *FIRST*.

In 2019, the [Woodie Flowers Memorial Grant](#) was established for *FIRST* Leadership Award Winners pursuing STEAM fields of study. This grant is awarded to a student selected from among the prior year's *FIRST* Robotics Competition and *FIRST* Tech Challenge Leadership Award winners.

Student Eligibility

Every registered *FIRST* Tech Challenge team can submit up to two (2) students as *FIRST* Leadership Award semi-finalists.

- Students must be a sophomore (grade 10) or junior (grade 11) to be eligible for this award.

  o Note: For regions of the world that do not use grade levels such as this to identify years of schooling: This award is intended for students who are two (2) to three (3) years away from entering college or university. Students that would be attending college or university in the next academic year are not eligible. Mentors will be asked for the year of graduation during the nomination process.

- The coach or mentor nominating the student(s) must submit an essay explaining why the student should receive this award. The essay must be 4,000 characters or less.

FIRST Leadership Award Criteria

Criteria for selection of the *FIRST* Leadership Award shall include, but not be limited to a student's:

- Demonstrated leadership and commitment to the *FIRST* Core Values
- Effectiveness at increasing awareness of *FIRST* in their school and community
- Demonstrates passion for a long-term commitment to *FIRST*
- The students' individual contributions to their team contribute to the overall success of the team
- Proven experience in areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)
- The student is a role model and can motivate and lead fellow team members

Important *FIRST* Leadership Award Season Dates

FIRST Leadership Award Important Dates	
September 6, 2025	Nominations open
December 15, 2025	Nominations due
February 15, 2026	Finalist selections due to *FIRST*
Various	RCMP's announce finalists
April 2026	Winners announced at *FIRST* Championship

FIRST Leadership Award Evaluation Structure

The chart below is a visual aid to show how each category feeds into specific levels of competition, starting with the coach making the nominations. *FIRST* Leadership Award Interviewers are responsible for interviewing semi-finalists (nominees). Interviews are mostly remote, with some regions doing in-person interviews (this will be region dependent, please check with your local Program Delivery Partner). The *FIRST* Leadership Award Reviewer will then review the nominations, and the interviewer notes within a state/region to determine which students will move to the next level as *FIRST* Leadership Award finalists. Depending upon the size of the region, there will be 2-4 *FIRST* Leadership Award finalists within each state or region (see FIRST Leadership Award Nomination Guide for further details). These finalists will be announced at the Regional Championship Tournament. A separate panel will review the *FIRST* Leadership Award finalists and choose the 10 *FIRST* Tech Challenge Leadership Award winners.
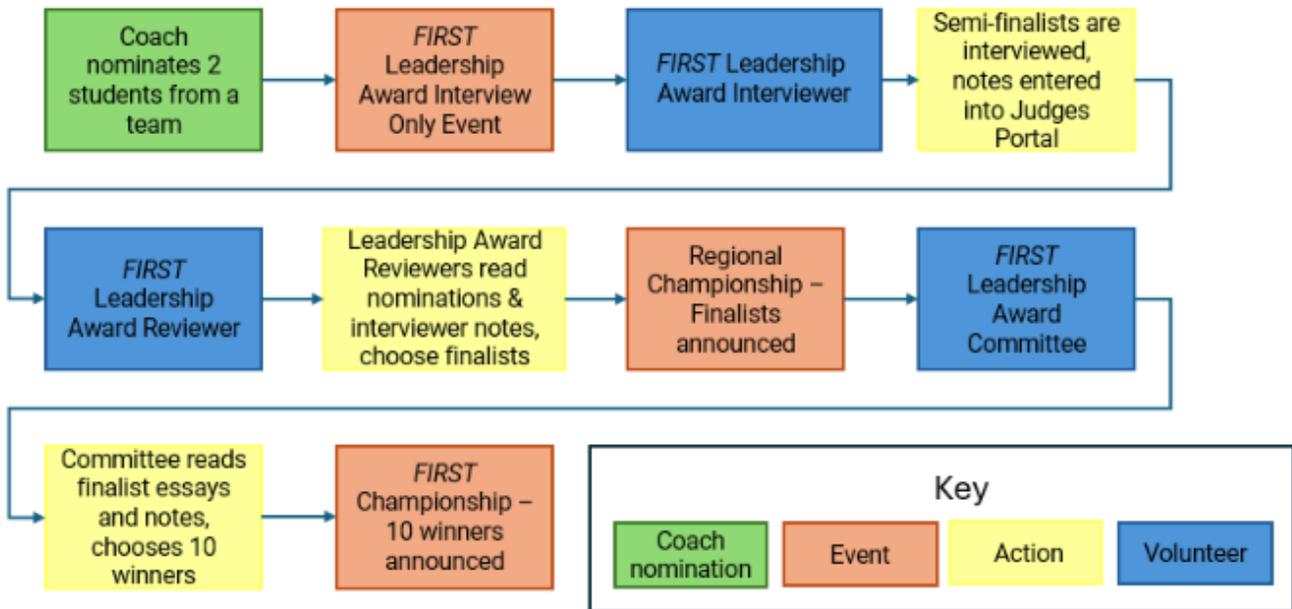
Before Finalist Selection

Pre-Event Training

FIRST Leadership Award Reviewers must complete the required reading in this section and are required to pass a certification test prior to serving in this role.

Resources for training and certification:

FIRST Leadership Award Reviewer Pre-Event Training List	
Requirement	**Resource**
Required	Welcome to *FIRST*
Required	The *FIRST* Leadership Award Reviewer Volunteer Manual (this document)
Required	Complete the *FIRST* Leadership Award Reviewer Certification Test in the *FIRST* Learning System, which is accessed through the www.firstinspires.org dashboard. (For volunteers outside of North America without a *FIRST* Dashboard Account use the PDF to self-certify)
Required	Complete the *FIRST* Data Protection and Privacy Training
Encouraged	Complete Strategies for Inspiring Success for All modules.
Encouraged	Attend the monthly Volunteer Calls

Access the Nominations

FIRST Leadership Award Reviewers are required to apply for this volunteer role through the dashboard on firstinspires.org. All reviewers are required to apply and complete YPP screening prior to accessing any student information.

FIRST Leadership Award nominations are posted on a private, password-protected site where only the Interviewers, Reviewers, and authorized *FIRST* staff can read the entries. The link to the system is below. Please see the `Judges Portal` section of this manual for further instructions and features of the system.

Link to Judges Portal: https://my.firstinspires.org/Judging/

Reviewer Collaboration

There must always be at least two Reviewers that will work together to read all the nominations and decide who the finalists will be. In some regions, a committee might be formed to review the nominations and to make final decisions. Reviewers should check with the Program Delivery Partner in their region to determine if a committee has been formed to review nominations, or if they will need to collaborate with one other individual.

Reviewers can choose to either meet in person, or via conference call to discuss each semi-finalist in detail. It is most helpful for each Reviewer to read the nominations prior to this meeting and have ideas of which candidates are the top contenders and why.

Review Timeline

The time for reviewing semi-finalists will vary slightly depending on the region. Each region has the option of selecting their interview time slots to complete interviews within the interview window noted in the

Important FIRST Leadership Award Season Dates. All finalist selections must be communicated to *FIRST* no later than February 15th, 2025. This can be done by selecting the student names in the Judges Portal.

FIRST Leadership Award Reviewers – Selecting Finalists

It can be a difficult task for the Reviewers to determine which semi-finalists will move to the next level as finalists. The Reviewer should always keep in mind the criteria when making their decisions. This section goes over some other items the Reviewer should and should not consider when making their decision.

FIRST Robotics Competition/*FIRST* Tech Challenge

Both *FIRST* Robotics Competition and *FIRST* Tech Challenge are eligible to be nominated for the *FIRST* Leadership Award in their region's program. There is no rule that states a student cannot be nominated for both. Additionally, a student can be selected as a *FIRST* Leadership Award Finalist for both *FIRST* Tech Challenge and *FIRST* Robotics Competition within the same season. Reviewers should focus on the student's accomplishments in the program they have been nominated for, rather than disregarding a student that has been nominated for both programs.

Individual Contributions

Many essay nominations will outline team activities but not necessarily discuss what the student's individual contributions are to the activity. This is where the job of the Interviewer is very important, and they have been instructed to include these types of notes to better assist the Reviewer in making their final decisions.

Other questions a Reviewer can ask themselves when making final decisions:

- Is the student a great ambassador for *FIRST*?
- Is the student a leader?
- Is this a student that will continue to be involved with *FIRST* and its mission in future years?
- How have they helped increase the awareness of *FIRST?*

Previous Year Finalists

If a student was selected as a finalist in the previous year, they are still eligible to be considered as a finalist for the current year, as long as they meet all other eligibility criteria.

Narrowing the List

Information in the essays should be used to distinguish the outstanding students.

- Compare data carefully and look for specifics, not generalizations.
- Where did the student initiate new opportunities for their team vs. contributing to existing team efforts?
- This is a *FIRST* award. While contributions to other STEM activities are good, an explicit commitment to *FIRST* programs should be very evident.

- Think about how their team might be different if they had never joined? How did their presence on the team make a profound difference?
- Is it clear that they played a critical role on their team or were they more of an individual contributor? Is there a progression of leadership or an increasing reliance on the student?
- What did they accomplish that made you AMAZED by them?

Number of Advancing Finalists

The number of semi-finalists that will move onto the next level as finalists depends upon the region. Regions with larger team numbers will have additional spots to advance students based on the previous year's registration numbers. Please see the _FIRST Leadership Award Nomination Guide_ for advancing finalists per region.

Judges Portal

Link to Judges Portal: https://my.firstinspires.org/Judging/

Review Nominations

1. Click "Login" at the upper righthand corner. This will redirect you to the www.firstinspires.org login page.

2. Log in using your username and password for your www.firstinspires.org account.

3. Once logged in, click "FTC – Leadership Award"

4. Click "Edit/View" to access the nominations for the event.

5. Click "Details" to access each individual nomination

6. The student information, along with the essay from the coach will be shown on this screen. Make sure to read through the nomination essay prior to interviewing each student.

View Submission 🖨 Printable Page   ◂ Back

2023 NH Test DLA Interview Only Event Remote - Team 8845 - John (Jack) Smith 12-Oct-2023

Team			🔒 Unlock
Team Number	8845	# Student on team	
City,State	Concord, NH		

Dean's List Award Nominee			
First Name	John (Jack)	Last Name	Smith
Year of graduation	2025	How long has the student been involved in *FIRST*?	5 years

Judging Venue	
Judge Nominee At	NH Test DLA Interview Only Event Remote

Submitter Contact Information			
Submitted By	Coach Name		
Phone	6036663906	Email	coach1@gmail.com

Explain how the student embodies the philosophies of *Gracious Professionalism*® and *Coopertition*® through the *FIRST* Core Values: Discovery, Innovation, Impact, Inclusion, Teamwork and Fun. Please provide examples.

Essay Test 1

How has the student increased the awareness of *FIRST*? Describe the student's interests and/or plans to continue to engage with *FIRST* beyond high school. Please provide examples.

Essay Test 2

How does the student's individual contribution to the team benefit the team as a whole? Please provide examples.

Essay Test 3

Describe the students' experience in areas of STEM. This could include but is not limited to skills in engineering, software, CAD, fabrication, etc. Please provide examples.

Essay Test 4

Explain the student's leadership to their fellow team members. How do they motivate others? What is their leadership style? Please provide examples.

Essay Test 5

Please share anything else you would like us to know about the student, including academic performance, specialized skills, or extracurricular activities.

Specialized skills, extracurricular activities, etc.

Reviewing Notes in the Judges Portal

The below screenshot shows the fields each interviewer will fill out after the Interview. Once the notes have been entered, the reviewer will read the notes that support the nomination.

Judge Review	
Who/When	Review
Add Review	
	Without verbatim repeating the information contained in the submission, please advise the Championship judges about any additional information you learned regarding the topics below: + How Finalist represents *FIRST* + Finalist's expertise you believe worth highlighting + Finalist's individual contribution to team and *FIRST* overall + Finalist's leadership capabilities characters left 0 / 10000
	Please provide any information you learned that is not included in the written submission that you believe is relevant for consideration. characters left 0 / 10000
○ Strongly Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Strongly Agree	Finalist truly represents the *FIRST* Core Values:
○ Strongly Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Strongly Agree	Finalist has proven experience in areas of science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM):
○ Strongly Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Strongly Agree	Finalist is a leader who you can envision leading future *FIRST* alumni:
○ Strongly Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Strongly Agree	Essay accurately reflects the student interviewed:
	+ Add

Selecting Finalists

1. Click the Edit/View button in the Regional Championship event.

2. There will be 2-4 dropdown boxes. Select the students' names in the dropdown lists, and click "save"

FIRST Leadership Award: Helpful Terms

These terms are intended to assist mentors in writing the nomination essays and for students to use during the interview. The use of these terms is not a requirement for submitting a nomination.

Possible Leadership Titles	
Captain	A top-level position of responsibility over the team • Teams with a flat leadership structure may have captains that cover specific areas, while making larger decisions as a group with no defined leader • Teams with a structured leadership would have one or more captains with multiple Leads working under them to lead smaller team areas. • Can be preceded by "co-" to indicate they shared that responsibility with one or more individuals.
Lead	A leadership position over a specific area of responsibility and should include a "team area" below. • Can be preceded by "co-" to indicate they shared that responsibility with one or more individuals.
Team Areas	
Marketing	Responsible for items like team branding, newsletters, website, etc.
Awards	Responsible for working on award submissions or pit presentation preparation.
Finance	Responsible for fundraising, grant writing, and sponsor relationships
Outreach	Responsible for organizing demonstrations and events not tied to competitions.
Drive Team, Scouting, and/or Strategy	Responsible for guiding the team's strategy, representing the team at competitions, and collecting data on the performance of other teams.
Mechanical	Responsible for the mechanical design and build of the robot. CAD can be included as a separate lead position or included alongside mechanical
Electrical	Responsible for the electrical design and build of the robot, including any sensors or custom circuits.
Programming	Responsible for programming the robot.
Other	Any team area that falls outside of the areas listed above should be detailed to provide the judges with appropriate context.
Action Specific Words	
Mentored	The student advises or trains, either in person or via phone/email/video conference, another team or team member, helping with technical or non-technical *FIRST* program specific issues.
Lead	the student leads an event if they are responsible for planning and execution. Can be preceded with "co-" to indicate a shared responsibility. • Planned - worked on the planning of the event but did not lead the execution. • Executed - responsible for the execution of the event - onsite leader throughout the event.
Conceived	Indicates the student introduced the initial concept.
Helped/Assisted	Indicates the student had significant impact or participation, without being a leader in that situation.

Useful Links and Information

On-Call Support Numbers

On-Call Support

These numbers are for *volunteer support only*. Teams should not use these numbers to call about rulings or technical assistance.

Administrative, Judge, Referee and Non-Technical Issues: (603)206-2412

Scoring System (FTC Live) or other Technical Issues: (603)206-2450

Call or use the **built-in chat feature on FTC Live** available for events with internet access.

Pre-Event Support

Mon – Fri   8:30am – 5:00pm Eastern Time (UTC-4 or UTC-5)
Contact Support including live chat or email customerservice@firstinspires.org

Program Resources

FIRST Tech Challenge Website

Event Search

Game and Season Resources

FIRST Tech Challenge Blog

Volunteer Resources

Team Email Blasts

Feedback

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