

Tournament Guide

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Introduction & Purpose

This Tournament Guide is your roadmap for running a *FIRST* Tech Challenge (FTC) tournament. Whether you're stepping into the Event Director (ED) role for the first time or supporting as a seasoned Volunteer Coordinator (VC), this guide is meant to give you the tools, context, and confidence to deliver a successful event.

It is designed to:

- Support core leadership roles (Event Directors, Volunteer Coordinators, PDPs, and key volunteers).
- Clarify the big picture of how a *FIRST* Tech Challenge tournament comes together.
- Connect you to the right resources without duplicating role-specific manuals or training.

Intended Audience

This Tournament Guide is designed to support the core leadership roles responsible for delivering a successful *FIRST* Tech Challenge tournament. It is written for:

Table 1: Intended Audience

Role	Description
Event Director (ED)	A volunteer or Program Deliver Partner (PDP) who oversees the full lifecycle of a tournament, from planning through execution and wrap-up.
Volunteer Coordinator (VC)	A people management leader responsible for recruiting, training, and supporting volunteers, and for ensuring all key roles are staffed.
Program Deliver Partner (PDP)	Regional leads (typically representatives of the Program Delivery Organization responsible for delivering <i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge in a local area) who provide oversight, resources, and consistency. PDPs may directly serve as EDs or support local organizing teams.
Planning Committee	Includes key volunteers such as Judge Advisors, FTAs, Head Referees, Scorekeepers, and Pit Admins, whose work intersects directly with the ED/VC team. It might also include aspiring ("shadow") leaders in these roles for training purposes.

Event Director is the common role for someone who is managing the full lifecycle of an event. However, it is common within *FIRST* Tech Challenge (depending on the event type or the Region) for the Event Director responsibilities to be split amongst the PDP, Event Director, or other members of the planning committee. Event Directors, Volunteer Coordinators, and Planning Committee members should always consult the PDP about regional specific expectations for these roles.

What This Guide Covers

This guide will walk you through the major steps of planning, running, and wrapping up an event, while also pointing you to the detailed resources and tools you'll need along the way.

You'll find both:

- **Big-picture overviews** – what needs to happen and when (like creating a budget, setting up a planning team, or keeping track of deadlines).
- **Practical tools and examples** – checklists, templates, and tips that help you put those plans into action.

The main focus of this document is tournament-scale events (League Tournaments, Qualifiers, and Regionals), since these are the backbone of the *FIRST* Tech Challenge season, but this guide also includes notes on smaller scrimmages and larger showcase events so you can adapt your approach to the size of your event.

Whether you're organizing your very first Qualifier or helping refine a Regional Championship, this guide is here to help you right-size your planning and make sure nothing important gets missed.

What This Guide Does Not Cover

FIRST Tech Challenge events rely on a large team of volunteers, each with their own responsibilities. To make sure every role is well-supported, *FIRST* provides [volunteer role-specific manuals](#) and training (for example, for Judges, Referees, or Scorekeepers).

This Tournament Guide is not meant to replace those resources. Instead, it gives organizers and leadership teams a big-picture view of how all the parts of a tournament come together. Think of this guide as the “map,” while the role manuals are the “how-to” instructions for each job.

The table below shows where to find the right resources and how this guide connects to them:

Table 2: Relationship Between Tournament Guide and Other Resources

Role / Area	Official Role Resources	How This Guide Relates
Judging (Judge Advisors, Judges)	Judge Advisor Manual , Judge Guide , <i>FIRST</i> training modules	References judging as part of the tournament but does not cover interview process or deliberation procedures.
FTA and Scorekeepers	Scorekeeper Guide, FTC-Live Set-up Guide , Scoring System documentation	Clarifies ED responsibility for ensuring the scoring system is ready and results are integrated but does not explain how to operate the software.
Refereeing (Head Referees, Referees)	Referee Manual , Head Referee Manual , Competition Manual	Highlights Referees’ role in arena operations but does not cover rules enforcement or penalties.
Field Operations Staff (FTA, CSA, Field Manager)	FTA Manual , CSA Manual , Field Operations Guide , Playing Field Resources	Acknowledges their critical role in technical operations; defers to official resources for setup and troubleshooting.
Event Director	Event Director Manual	Complements but does not replace; this guide focuses on how the ED role connects across the tournament.

Role / Area	Official Role Resources	How This Guide Relates
Volunteer Coordinator	Volunteer Coordinator Manual	Complements and provides more in depth guidance on how to recruit and assign volunteers. Volunteer Coordinator Manual provides in-depth guidance from the role perspective.
Other Tournament Leadership Roles (e.g., Pit Admin Lead, Lead Queuer)	FTC Volunteer Role Descriptions and volunteer guidance from <i>FIRST</i>	Provides context for how Planning Committees might support the event but does not duplicate their step-by-step responsibilities.

How to Navigate this Guide

The Tournament Guide is organized into six major sections, each answering a core question about how a *FIRST* Tech Challenge event comes together. This structure allows Event Directors, Volunteer Coordinators, and Planning Committees to find the right level of detail at the right time. Each section balances vision with practice: starting with the scope and infrastructure that define an event, moving through the systems and culture that shape the experience, and concluding with execution and reflection. Together, these sections form a complete roadmap—from the first conversations about scope to the final debrief after the last match.

If this is your first time leading or supporting a *FIRST* Tech Challenge event, don't be intimidated by the number of sections in this guide. You are not expected to master everything at once. Each section is meant to give you just enough context to understand what's happening and where your role fits in. Focus on the areas directly connected to your responsibilities, and trust that the rest of the planning team will cover their parts. Over time, the full picture will become clearer as you gain experience across multiple events.

Table 3: Tournament Guide Section Map

Section	Core Question	Focus Area	What It Covers
Event Scope	<i>What are we running?</i>	Vision & boundaries	Event type, size, advancement status, objectives
Event Infrastructure	<i>How is the event authorized and resourced?</i>	Structure & compliance	Planning Committee, Governance, Budget and Finance, Venue Selection and Early Logistics, Schedule, Materials
Event Hospitality and Culture	<i>How do people experience the event?</i>	People & relationships	Setting Tone with Communication, Team Management, volunteer management, Creating an Event Culture

Section	Core Question	Focus Area	What It Covers
Pre-Event Operations	<i>How do we prepare the systems?</i>	Technical & operational readiness	Scoring system setup, judging operations, pit operations, incident management, technical/AV systems, show & production planning
Event Day Operations	<i>How do we run the event?</i>	Live execution	Match flow, judging flow, ceremonies, communication loops, incident management, volunteer coordination during the event
Wrap Up and Reporting	<i>How do we close and learn from the event?</i>	Reflection & reporting	Debrief, reporting requirements, sponsor recognition, documentation of lessons learned, feedback collection

Some large sections (such as Venue Selection and Early Logistics), also provide section maps during the section introduction to provide additional navigation help.

Event Scope

FIRST Tech Challenge events vary widely in scope. Some are small scrimmages with a handful of teams, others are structured league meets that build toward a tournament, and others are Regional Championships or even international showcases. To plan effectively, organizers must understand **scope**—the combination of size, type, status, and level that defines how much planning, staffing, and infrastructure an event requires.

Scope is the first and most important concept for planning a FIRST Tech Challenge Event. Getting scope right sets realistic expectations: how early to start planning, how many volunteers are needed, and how complex logistics will be. A 12-team league meet, a 34-team scrimmage, and a 72-team regional championship all look very different, but each can succeed if the scope is understood and matched with the right level of preparation.

The Program Delivery Partner (PDP) plays a key role in determining the scope of the event. For advancing events, the PDP decides how many tournaments a region will have, how large they should be, and what advancement paths they support. While the Event Director manages day-to-day planning, the PDP defines the event’s place in the broader system.

Scope is made up of four components. Each introduces a different layer of complexity: *some are simple building blocks, while others require more advanced planning and integration*. The table below shows these components, moving from the simplest orientation (event models and status) to the most complex (levels, which combine type, status, and size into a full picture of scope).

Table 4: Components of Scope

Category	What It Explains	Complexity Scale
Event Models	The basic types of <i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge events: scrimmages, league meets, league tournaments, qualifiers, regional championships, premier events, and off-season showcases. Establishes the purpose of the event (practice, advancement, celebration).	Simple
Event Status	Whether an event is official, endorsed, or unofficial. Status determines if advancement is offered and what requirements must be followed (rules, certified volunteers, reporting).	Simple
Event Size	How many teams the event serves. Size directly affects the number of volunteers, fields, pits, venue needs, and length of planning timeline. A scrimmage can be large, and a qualifier can be small—size always changes the scope of responsibilities.	Moderate
Event Levels	A combined view of scope. Levels 0–3 describe how responsibilities scale as event type, status, and size interact. This framework helps organizers right-size planning—from a small scrimmage with a handful of volunteers to a regional championship requiring a full committee and months of preparation.	Moderate–Complex

Together, these components define what an event requires in terms of planning, staffing, and infrastructure. A scrimmage with 34 teams and a league meet with 12 teams may look very different in purpose, but both have a scope that can be right-sized for their needs.

Event Size

Event size is one of the most important drivers of scope. The number of teams directly impacts how many volunteers are needed, how much space is required, how much money must be budgeted, and how far ahead planning should begin.

Unlike event type, level, or status, size is not fixed by definition. A Scrimmage could involve 12 teams or 34; a Qualifier might be designed for 20 teams or for 40. This independence makes size an essential overlay: it cuts across every type of event and changes how responsibilities scale.

Pairing size with type, level, and status gives organizers the most accurate picture of what an event will actually require. A small tournament can be managed with a lean crew, while a large one may need months of planning and a full committee.

The table below shows how different areas of infrastructure and operations typically scale with event size. The numbers are not absolute, but they highlight the kinds of differences organizers should expect when moving from small to large events.

This table is a simplified way to think about event size and infrastructure. The categories (small, medium, large) are generalized to help with early planning and right-sizing your committee, venue, and volunteer pool.

They differ from the Competition Manual in Section 13.7, which ties event size to playoff alliances (see Table 13-2). Think of it this way: the Competition Manual defines how playoffs and awards are structured, while this guide offers a planning framework for resources and logistics. Use them together – one for rules of play, the other for hosting preparation.

Table 5: Event Size and Impact on Components of Infrastructure and Operations

Infrastructure and Operations	Small Event (<25 teams)	Medium Event (25–36 teams)	Large Event (48–72+ teams)	Questions to Ask
Planning Timeline	4–6 weeks	2–3 months	4–6+ months	How early do I need to secure venue, volunteers, and funding?
Planning Committee	ED with 1–2 support leads	ED with 3–5 leads (pits, volunteers, logistics, etc.)	Full committee with defined functional leads	Do I have the leadership depth to share responsibilities?
Volunteers	~20–25	~40–50	~75–150+	What is my recruitment pipeline?
Competition Fields	1	2	2–4, sometimes multiple divisions*	Is there space, equipment, and staff for this many fields?
Venue Infrastructure	Single gym/cafeteria	Gym + classrooms	Multiple gyms/arena or convention hall	Does the venue have capacity and services for this size?

Large events (typically with more than 48 teams) are often run as **dual division tournaments**. In this model, the event is split into two parallel competition divisions (for example, two Qualifying Tournaments, each with at least two fields). Judging is conducted concurrently across all teams. Once the Playoff Matches conclude in each division, the winning alliances from both divisions face off to determine the overall event champion.

This Tournament Guide does not cover dual divisions in depth. While most planning, infrastructure, and operational details are similar to single-division events, dual divisions introduce unique considerations such as division staffing, coordination across multiple fields, synchronized schedules, and combined award ceremonies. These elements add complexity that requires additional planning and will be addressed in future resources.

As events grow, planning timelines lengthen – not only because of more teams but also because larger venues, AV services, and sponsorships must be secured earlier. The size of the Planning Committee reflects the same pattern: at a small event, one person can wear several hats, but at larger events, specialized leads are essential to prevent overload. Volunteer needs scale even more quickly, since Inspectors, Referees, Judges, and Queuers, etc. multiply with more fields and more teams.

Event Types and Descriptions

Every *FIRST* Tech Challenge event can be described by its **type, status, and level**. Together, these three factors determine whether the event is considered a **tournament**, what advancement opportunities it provides, and how much responsibility is expected of the organizers.

- **Event type** establishes the purpose of the event: Scrimmages and Off-Seasons provide practice and outreach, League Meets and Qualifiers determine advancement, and premier events and the *FIRST* Championship serve as capstone celebrations.
- **Event status** clarifies whether an event is official, endorsed, or unofficial. Only official events provide advancement, and they must follow all *FIRST* Tech Challenge rules, use the official field and scoring system, report results to *FIRST*, and be staffed by certified and screened key volunteers. Endorsed events are sanctioned by a PDP or *FIRST* HQ but sit outside advancement. Unofficial events are fully independent but may still be valuable for practice or community building.
- **Event levels** place events on a scale of complexity, from Level 0 - Scrimmages to Level 3 - Regional Championships. Models tell you what type of event you are running; levels show how much planning responsibility it carries. **Table 3** maps how type, status, and level interact. It shows which events advance, what their core purpose is, and how responsibilities grow as events move from informal scrimmages to large-scale championships.

Event size is not represented in this table, but it also plays a critical role in defining scope. A scrimmage may be large, and a qualifier may be small – size cuts across all types and levels. See the Event Size and Scope Matrix for how size changes planning requirements.

As events grow in scope, expectations scale with them. At the most basic level, some responsibilities are **required** for an event to count as official. Beyond those essentials, most tournaments adopt **standard** practices that smooth operations and provide consistency across regions. At higher levels, **recommended** enhancements elevate the experience for teams, volunteers, and guests. This progression allows organizers to right-size their planning: start with the essentials, add standards to build consistency, and layer enhancements when resources allow.

Table 6: Event Types and Descriptions

Level	Event Type	Abv	Status	Advancement	Purpose / Key Features	Expectations
Level 0	Scrimmage		Endorsed / Unofficial	None	Informal, practice-only events; often used for training volunteers, testing fields, or community outreach. Not considered official tournaments.	Great for team practice, volunteer training, and community-building. Do not provide advancement.
	Offseason				Community-driven tournaments held outside the official season. Mirror official events in structure but focus on celebration, training, and sponsor/community engagement.	
Level 1	League Meet	LM	Official	None Rankings carry forward to LT	Short events (3–6 hours) with qualification matches only. No judging or awards. Multiple meets build toward a League Tournament. For more details on how leagues work review the League Guide . League Meets do not advance to QTs	Must meet minimum requirements for an official FTC tournament. For many teams, this is the highest level of competition they experience.
	League Tournament	LT		To Level 2	Culminating event of a league season; includes judging, awards, and advancement. Rankings from League Meets are combined here. For more details on how leagues work review the League Guide.	
	Qualifying Tournament	QT			Standalone tournaments including inspection, judging, qualification and elimination matches, awards, and advancement.	
	Super Qualifying Tournament	SQT			Another layer of tournaments held in regions with a large number of teams and/or Leagues. In this model teams advance from either a League Tournament or Qualifying Tournament to a Super-Qualifying Tournament, and then to the Regional Championship. Super-Qualifying Tournaments adhere to <i>FIRST</i> standards in format, judging, and awards.	
Level 2	Regional Championship	RCMP		To Level 3	Larger events organized by Program Delivery Partners. Bring together advancing teams from Qualifiers and Leagues. Feature expanded logistics and volunteer crews.	Expected to meet minimum requirements and adopt most standard practices. Typically feature expanded logistics, multiple fields, and larger volunteer crews.
Level 3	<i>FIRST</i> Championship	FCMP		From Level 2	International culminating event with full judging, production standards, and global consistency. Top teams showcase on the world stage.	Expected to fully implement minimum, standard, and recommended practices for consistency and quality.
	<i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge Premier Event	FPE		Invitational and from Level 2	Capstone events celebrating FTC teams. Teams advance the same way as to <i>FIRST</i> Championship (via Regional Champs). Hosts may also invite limited teams directly.	

Event Infrastructure

Once the event scope is defined – how many teams, what level of play, and the general format – the next step is building the event infrastructure that will carry the tournament forward. This section covers the foundational planning and logistical pieces that every Event Director and planning team should address early in the process:

Table 7: Event Infrastructure Section Map

Focus Area	What It Covers	Why It Matters
Planning Committee	Defining who is at the table, leadership structure, and how responsibilities are shared	A clear committee prevents overload and ensures every critical function has a lead
Governance	Confirming certifications, agreements, policies, and regional requirements	Compliance with <i>FIRST</i> and regional policies makes the event official and trustworthy
Budget & Finance	Clarifying expenses, stipends, reimbursements, and financial oversight	Aligns resources with goals and prevents financial surprises
Venue & Early Logistics	Selecting and preparing the physical site, contracts, services, and early planning needs	Locks in the foundation for all other decisions; early missteps here ripple through the event
Schedule	Establishing the timeline for judging, inspections, matches, ceremonies, meals, and breaks	A coherent schedule keeps the event on pace and volunteers/teams confident
Layout	Mapping pits, fields, judging, queuing, audience, and traffic flow	Good layout drives smooth operations, accessibility, and safety
Materials & Procurement	Identifying, sourcing, and tracking supplies such as fields, electronics, signage, print materials, and hospitality items	Ensures critical resources are available, reduces last-minute scrambles, and supports consistency across events

These areas represent the core building blocks of event infrastructure. A planning committee provides the leadership to carry each piece forward. Governance establishes the rules and agreements that make the event official. Budgeting secures the resources to support delivery. Venue selection locks in the physical foundation. The schedule gives tournaments their pacing and structure. Layout ensures that pits, fields, judging, and audience areas are arranged for safe and efficient flow. Finally, materials and procurement ensure all the supplies, signage, and equipment are ready when needed. Together, these elements turn scope into a workable framework for success.

Planning Committees

The first step in building a strong planning committee is making sure the right people are in place to carry the event forward. At smaller tournaments, the Event Director may wear several hats, but as events grow, a single person cannot plan and deliver everything alone. A planning committee brings together key leaders who ensure no responsibility is overlooked, distribute the workload across volunteers, and build continuity from season to season.

The committee is not meant to be large or bureaucratic – it's a working group that meets a few times before the event to confirm readiness in each major area. The Event Director or Volunteer Coordinator provides overall coordination, but each member is trusted to manage their domain and raise issues early. Some committees meet monthly, others only once or twice; what matters is consistency and clarity in how decisions are made and shared.

For Level 1 and 2 events please check with your Program Delivery Partner for recommendations on local best practices for event planning committees. Your Program Delivery Partner may have recommendations on what roles should be incorporated in the planning committee or suggestions on experienced volunteers to fill planning committee roles.

At the heart of every planning committee are the key volunteers. These are the handful of core roles that typically help with running an event and including them early in planning can help distribute the load.

Table 8: Recommended Planning Committee Volunteers

Role	Key Pre-Event Responsibilities	Success Factors
Event Director (ED)	Works with the PDP/PDO to define event scope, scheduling, and location. Liaison with facility, staff coordination.	Calm under pressure, decision-making, critical thinking, attention to detail, good at project management and execution, strong problem solver.
Volunteer Coordinator (VC)	Recruits and assigns volunteers, advocate for volunteers, manages volunteer hospitality, manages day-of volunteer operations.	Written and verbal communication, matching people to roles, organization.
FIRST Technical Advisor (FTA)	Leads field operations; plans and executes the Event Technical Checklist.	Technical comfort, troubleshooting, communication.
Judge Advisor (JA)	Recruits, trains, coaches Judges, builds judging schedule, ensures process readiness.	Facilitation, organization, diplomacy, attention to detail.
Head Referee (HR)	Recruits/trains Referees. Review competition manual updates, prepare drivers meeting, offer advice or best practices from a Head Referee perspective. Leads with the ethos of the program, and shared importance of helping the students have a positive event.	Rule expertise, conflict management, clarity in communication.
Lead Scorekeeper/ FTA	Sets up and manages the FTC-Live scoring system for the event. Works with the Event Director, Judge Advisor and FTA to provide match details, schedules and event printables Distributes tablets to other event users (ex. Referees and Head Referee,)	Strong system administration, accuracy of match results and awards, multi-task to provide all requested schedules and reports for event flow, technical confidence. Works well with all event volunteers.
Technical Director (TD)	If staffed, leads technical operations and setup of scoring infrastructure.	Technical comfort, troubleshooting, communication.

Additional members may be added as needed – such as a Safety Lead, Accessibility Coordinator, Hospitality Coordinator, or AV/Production Manager – but the principle is the same: build a small team of trusted leaders who each carry a piece of the event.

Governance

Defining the scope sets the vision for an event. Governance is what keeps that vision on solid ground. It provides the guardrails that make tournaments safe, consistent, and legitimate, no matter where or at what level they take place.

- **Safety** – Volunteers are screened, trained, and prepared to protect youth.

- **Consistency** – Key roles are certified, rules are applied fairly, and sensitive data is handled responsibly.
- **Legitimacy** – Teams meet eligibility requirements, hosts follow regional policies, and formal agreements clarify expectations.

These requirements don't by themselves make an event "official," but they ensure that once an event is recognized by *FIRST* and the PDP, it delivers the trusted experience teams and volunteers expect.

Governance is **non-negotiable**. Regardless of event level, compliance with *FIRST* policies – including data privacy – is required for all official *FIRST* Tech Challenge tournaments.

Governance isn't a one-time task; it's a rhythm. Some requirements cycle every three years (Youth Protection), others reset annually (certifications, host training), and others must be checked fresh at every tournament (eligibility, data privacy). The table below summarizes those rhythms at a glance.

Table 9: Policy and Training Requirements by Role

Requirement	Applies To	Frequency	Notes
Youth Protection Screening	All volunteers	Every 3 years	Volunteers must be cleared before event day; in North America, Lead Coach 1 & 2 must also pass screening.
Volunteer Certification	All volunteers	Annual / per season	Certification through <i>FIRST</i> required; modules on <i>FIRST</i> platforms.
Team Eligibility	ED, PDP	Each event	Only registered, paid teams in good standing may compete. Rosters and consent forms collected securely.
Data Privacy & Incident Reporting	ED, VC, PDP	Each event	Protect team/volunteer data; no public sharing; use <i>FIRST</i> incident reporting tools; comply with applicable privacy laws.
Regional Policies & Host Training	ED	Annual	PDP-specific requirements (e.g., sponsor recognition, financial reporting, insurance).

Regional Policies and Event Agreements

In addition to *FIRST* requirements, each region may establish its own governance policies. These often cover financial reporting, sponsor recognition, insurance coverage, or other local procedures.

The most common form of regional governance is an event agreement. While agreements vary region to region, this document is typically signed with the PDP and may define:

Table 10: Typical Components of a Regional Event Agreement

Area	What It Covers
Financial Responsibilities	Who manages budget categories, payments, and reimbursements
Equipment Expectations	Who provides fields, laptops, consumables, and other resources
Branding & Sponsor Rules	How regional sponsors must be recognized and displayed

Area	What It Covers
Insurance & Liability Coverage	What coverage is required and who provides it

Because these agreements vary by region, Event Directors should confirm requirements with their PDP early in the planning process. Without completing regional policies and agreements, an event may not qualify as an official advancing tournament.

Budgeting and Finance

Every *FIRST* Tech Challenge event requires a budget and a financial plan – but the way these are handled varies significantly by region, delivery model, and event level. For official advancing events (Levels 1 and 2), the Program Delivery Partner (PDP) is always the final authority: they set team registration pricing, oversee compliance, and define what resources are centrally provided (such as fields, laptops, consumables, or insurance).

For that reason, the first step in financial planning is always the same: **consult your PDP**. They will clarify which costs you must plan for locally and which are already covered. Beyond this, the specific budget process can range from fully PDP-managed, to a shared plan with the host site, to more direct oversight by the Event Director at small scrimmages or Premier-style events.

Building an Event Budget

Regardless of who manages the money, every official event should have a budget that answers two questions:

- What expenses are expected?
- How will those expenses be covered?

Event Directors should at minimum maintain a “shadow budget” – a working copy that tracks anticipated needs and actual costs, even if the PDP owns the official budget. This helps the committee anticipate shortfalls, advocate for resources, and learn the financial rhythm of running tournaments.

Typical expense areas include:

Table 11: Common Expenses Areas

Category	Common Examples	Notes on Responsibility
Venue Costs	Rental, custodial, security, insurance	May be provided in-kind by venues; confirm with PDP what budget limits are for rentals
Event Operations	Game elements, awards, field technology, AV, printing, signage	Some resources (fields, laptops) loaned by PDP; local materials vary
Volunteer Support	Meals, quiet room, thank-you items, shirts	Almost always coordinated locally, with PDP guidance
Contingency	Last-minute supplies, rentals, repairs	Keep at least 5–10% buffer where possible

Roles in Financial Management

In most regions, the Program Delivery Partner (PDP) manages finances within a larger **Program Delivery Organization (PDO)**. These organizations often have established financial management

policies and are the entity that carries insurance coverage for official events. That means the PDP provides both oversight and compliance guardrails, while the Event Director and committee focus on managing local expenses and coordinating in-kind support.

Table 12: PDP and ED Roles in Financial Management

Responsibility Area	Typically PDP Leads	Typically ED / Committee Leads
Registration Fees	Sets team pricing, collects payments	N/A
Core Equipment	Provides/loans fields, laptops, networking equipment, scoring systems hardware (computers and displays)	Helps coordinate delivery and return
Compliance & Reporting	Ensures insurance coverage, financial reporting, and sponsor recognition are consistent with PDO policies	Provides supporting data as requested
Local Expenses	May offer stipend or direct reimbursement	Coordinates venue, meals, signage, local supplies
In-Kind Support	May coordinate region-wide sponsor packages (e.g., awards, volunteer shirts)	May secures local donations (food, AV, printing, supplies)

The exact division of responsibilities is not universal. Some PDPs centralize nearly everything, while others delegate much more to the Event Director and host. Confirm early with your PDP how responsibilities are divided in your region.

Team Registration and Revenue

For official advancing events (Levels 1 and Level 2), team registration fees are set and collected by the PDP as part of the region’s financial model. The Event Director does not set pricing and is not responsible for collecting payments.

What Event Directors and Planning Committees *do* need to know:

- **Registration revenue** is the core funding stream that sustains programs in most regions.
- **PDPs manage payment and eligibility** – teams must be “event-ready” (registered, paid, and cleared in the *FIRST* system) before they can compete. PDPs may have another event or local registration fee requirement.
- **Local organizers may still track registration status** (with PDP confirmation) to plan for meals, pit layouts, or printing.

Fundraising and Sponsorship

Financial sustainability for *FIRST* Tech Challenge tournaments rarely comes from team registration alone. Most events depend on two additional streams:

- **Formal sponsorships** – negotiated at the regional level by the Program Delivery Partner (PDP), often within the Program Delivery Organization (PDO). These can include corporate donations, foundation grants, or multi-event sponsor packages.
- **In-kind support** – donated goods and services that reduce local expenses, such as schools providing AV, parents organizing volunteer meals, or local businesses lending equipment.

Event Directors are not expected to secure major sponsorships. Instead, they may be responsible for:

- Identifying and connecting local partners or community contacts to the PDP.
- Coordinating in-kind contributions that directly reduce event costs.
- Ensuring all recognition (logos, signage, acknowledgements) follows PDP and *FIRST* policies.

Recognition is an important part of fundraising. Sponsors may receive logo placement on programs, signage, or volunteer shirts, and should always receive formal thanks after the event. However, official awards, competition fields, and game elements may **not** include sponsor branding – these are reserved for *FIRST* and global sponsor recognition.

Sample Budgets

In Table Table 133 there are example budgets for **12-team Qualifying Tournament** and a **34-team Qualifying Tournament**. These are not exact prescriptions, but illustrations of how common assumptions add up, and which expenses scale as events grow. Even small tournaments carry real costs, while larger ones multiply staffing and facility needs.

These numbers come from straightforward formulas and typical ranges:

Direct Costs – Costs that are directly applied to a specific event

- **Team Registration Fees** assume \$250 per team.
- **Volunteer Meals** are calculated as:
of volunteers × (\$4 breakfast + \$2 snacks/drinks + \$15 lunch)
- **Custodial Costs** usually \$20–\$40/hour. A league tournament typically needs 1 custodian for ~8 hours; a qualifier often needs 2 custodians for ~10 hours.
- **Security Costs** usually \$50–\$75/hour. A small event may need 1 guard for ~8 hours; a larger event often needs 2 guards for 10–12 hours.
- **Awards/Trophies** are estimated at \$25 each × 14 trophies.

Indirect Costs – These are costs that are typically incurred and amortized across multiple events. For instance, competition fields and game sets may be purchased by the PDP and used repetitively throughout the season.

- **Competition Fields and Game Sets** are calculated at about \$1,279 per field plus \$485 per game set, plus shipping (~\$3,000 for a league tournament, ~\$6,000 for a qualifier with two fields).
- **Electronics** (scoring computers, displays, cabling) are valued at ~\$5,000–\$7,000 depending on event size.
- **Insurance Coverage** is often provided by the Program Delivery Partner (PDP) or Program Delivery Organization (PDO).

Together, these examples illustrate how tournament budgets balance predictable income with venue, staffing, and equipment costs—and why indirect expenses provided by PDPs are so critical to making events sustainable.

Table 13: Sample Budgets for Example Small and Large Tournaments

Category	12-Team Qualifying Tournament	34-Team Qualifying Tournament
Income		
Team Registration Fees	12 teams × \$250 = \$3,000	34 teams × \$250 = \$8,500
Local Sponsorship / Donations	In-kind support (snacks, printing) ≈ \$0–\$300	In-kind or small sponsor ≈ \$500
Total Income	~\$3,000–\$3,300	~\$9,000
Direct Event Expenses		
Venue Rental	Often \$0 (donated school gym)	\$500 (larger school/municipal fee)
Custodial	\$20–\$40/hr × 1 custodian × 8 hrs = \$160–\$320	\$/hr \$20–\$40 × 2 custodians × 10 hrs = \$400–\$800
Security	\$50–\$75/hr × 1 guard × 8 hrs = \$400–\$600	\$/hr \$50–\$75 × 2 guards × 10–12 hrs = \$1,000–\$1,800
Volunteer Meals	# of Volunteers × (Breakfast \$4 + Snacks/Drinks \$2 + Lunch \$15)	# of Volunteers × (Breakfast \$4 + Snacks/Drinks \$2 + Lunch \$15)
Awards / Trophies	14 trophies × ~\$20 = \$280	14 trophies × ~\$20 = \$280
Printing & Signage	\$50	\$150
Misc. Supplies / Contingency	\$100	\$200
Total Direct Event Expenses	~\$1,030–\$1,180	~\$2,930
Indirect Event Expenses		
Competition Fields and Game Sets	\$1,279 /field + \$485/game set + shipping = ~\$3,000	\$1,279/field (2 fields) + \$485 per game set (2 game sets) + shipping = ~\$6,000
Electronics	\$5,000	\$7,000
Insurance Coverage	Provided by PDP / PDO	Provided by PDP / PDO
Total Indirect Expenses	~\$6,000	~\$10,000

Venue Selection and Early Logistics:

One of the most consequential decisions in planning a tournament is selecting the venue. Venue choice is not simply about square footage — it is about how well the event will *function* once hundreds of students, mentors, volunteers, and guests are moving through the space.

Scope drives venue needs. A league meet with 12 teams might run comfortably in a school cafeteria, while a 72-team regional championship may need an arena with multiple gyms, spectator seating, and professional AV support. The number of teams, the type of event, and its advancement level dictate not only how much room you need, but also how early you must book, how many volunteers you’ll recruit, and how complex your safety plan will become.

A poor fit creates ripple effects:

- **Too small** → bottlenecks at inspection, crowded pits, safety hazards in hallways, frustrated spectators.

- **Too large** → wasted budget on empty space, longer walking distances that exhaust volunteers, difficulty keeping communication tight, and more area for team members to explore.

The “right” venue is the one that aligns with your event’s scope – meeting must-haves (fields, pits, judging rooms, safe flow) while staying within budget and staffing capacity. This section will guide you through the major factors to consider:

Table 14: Venue Selection Section Map

Focus Area	What It Covers	Why It Matters
Space Requirements	Translating team count into square footage for pits, fields, judging, and audience areas	Right-sizing the venue ensures enough room for competition, flow, and safety without overspending on unnecessary space
Venue Types	Comparing schools, colleges, municipal centers, and commercial venues	Each venue type comes with strengths and tradeoffs in cost, amenities, and logistics – choosing wisely prevents surprises
Site Visits	Walking the site to confirm layout flow (fields, pits, judging, audience) and technical needs (power, internet, AV)	On-paper specs rarely tell the whole story; site visits uncover gaps or deal-breakers before contracts are signed
Venue Services	Custodial, parking, IT, security, and other hidden services	These costs and policies often define the true expense and day-of functionality of a venue
Safety & Emergency Planning	How venue safety plans integrate with your event plan	Ensures compliance, preparedness, and participant safety in case of incidents
Contracting	Securing the venue relationship with clear terms	Clarifies responsibilities and prevents costly misunderstandings on event day

Taken together, these considerations help ensure that your venue decision supports not just event size, but also safe flow, positive experience, and smooth delivery.

Space Requirements

Event size is the most direct driver of venue needs. A league meet with 12 teams might succeed in a cafeteria, while a 72-team regional championship may require an arena with multiple gyms, spectator seating, and professional AV support.

Understanding your team count gives you a realistic baseline for how much space is needed for pits, fields, judging rooms, seating, and safe traffic flow. More details on specifics around preparing for size can be found in Layout Considerations.

It is important to know that League Meet events do not include judging and hosts of league meets do not need to prepare judging spaces.

Table 15: Event Space Requirements Based on Number of Teams

Requirement Area	Small Event (<25 teams)	Medium Event (25–36 teams)	Large Event (48–72+ teams)	Questions to Ask
Field Area	1 field	1–2 fields	4+ fields	Is there floor space for required fields and audience?
Pit Area	Compact footprint; 1 practice field; small Pit Admin table	Dedicated pit area separate from competition; 1 practice field; inspection space	Wide aisles, 2+ practice fields, full Pit Admin area	Can pits be arranged with 8' aisles and safe cart paths?
Judging Rooms	4 rooms + deliberation room	4–6 rooms + deliberation room	6+ rooms + large deliberation room	Are rooms private, quiet, and accessible?
Spectator Seating	~100 seats	150–300 seats	500+ seats	Can the venue support AV, banners, sound?
Hospitality Spaces	1 Volunteer Lounge + 1 Quiet Room + Space for Teams to Eat	Size of rooms for use may scale: 1 Volunteer Lounge + 1 Quiet Room + Space for Teams to Eat	Size of rooms for use may scale: 1 Volunteer Lounge + 1 Quiet Room + Space for Teams to Eat	Are there spaces for volunteers, teams, and spectators to get downtime?
Accessibility & Flow	Basic ADA compliance	Full ADA; wide aisles, ramps	Full ADA; efficient traffic flow for carts and spectators	Are robot paths free of stairs or narrow hallways?

Requirement Area	Small Event (<25 teams)	Medium Event (25–36 teams)	Large Event (48–72+ teams)	Questions to Ask
Load In/ Load Out Access	Easy gym or cafeteria access	Adequate load-in for field/pit equipment	May need loading dock access to bring AV equipment	How accessible is the venue for setup and tear down? How early are you allowed to set up and how late can you stay to clean up after the event?

Venue Types

Once you know your size requirements, the next question is: *what kind of venue can realistically meet them?* Most organizers have a default option in mind (a school, a college gym, or a municipal space), but it’s worth considering the trade-offs. Each type of facility comes with common strengths and pain points that may affect cost, logistics, and participant experience.

Table 16: Common venue type pros and cons

Venue Type	Event Levels (Typical Fit)	Strengths	Watch Outs
School Gyms or Cafeterias	Common for Level 0 (scrimmages, off-season) and Level 1 (League Meets, League Tournaments, Qualifiers)	- Familiar, community-based spaces	- Custodial/security fees
		- Often low cost or in-kind	- Food restrictions
		- Works well for 1–2 fields	- District policies vary widely
			- Limited seating/AV
College Campuses	Often used for Level 1 Tournaments and Level 2 events (Regional-scale)	- Larger gyms, lecture halls, or rec centers	- Rental processes vary widely
		- Adds prestige and connects students to higher ed	- May require staff/security costs
		- Multiple rooms for judging and volunteers	
Community or Municipal Venues	Suitable for Level 2 events (large Qualifiers, Regional-scale tournaments)	- Designed for public events	- Higher rental costs
		- Professional logistics staff	- Vendor restrictions (food, concessions)
		- Larger parking and spectator capacity	- City services like EMT/security may be required
Commercial Venues (Convention)	Reserved for Level 3 events (Premier or	- Very high capacity	- Highest cost tier
		- Strong spectator amenities	- Complex contracts

Venue Type	Event Levels (Typical Fit)	Strengths	Watch Outs
Centers, Expo Halls, Rodeo Arenas)	State/Regional Championships)	- Professional image for teams and sponsors	- Insurance and liability demands

Beyond what is included in the table above, there are lots of factors to consider when selecting a venue:

Schools are often the most accessible option, but may come with food or custodial restrictions. Colleges bring prestige and scale but can introduce hidden costs. Community centers and commercial venues expand capacity, but contracts and price points are steeper. Matching venue type to your scope ensures you're not under- or over-building your event.

- **Schools** are the backbone of *FIRST* Tech Challenge event hosting. They are affordable, accessible, and rooted in the community. Often, the strongest value is in partnerships – robotics teachers or administrators can sometimes secure in-kind support for facilities, custodial, or security costs. Many schools are flexible, though larger districts may enforce more formalized facility-use policies with set fee structures.
- **Colleges** provide scale and visibility, and they often add prestige to the event experience. Access usually depends on cultivating partnerships with faculty or student organizations. Some institutions offer reduced rates or free access for educational events, while others apply standard rental policies. Costs for custodial, security, and parking are common, and IT/AV support may vary.
- **Community and municipal venues** are designed for public gatherings and can be reliable alternatives to schools or colleges. They come with professional logistics support but at a higher price point. These facilities also tend to enforce stricter rules about vendors, concessions, and public safety services.
- **Commercial venues** – convention centers, expo halls, rodeo or sports arenas – are rarely used except for the largest events. They provide unmatched capacity, flexible layouts, and strong sponsor visibility, but their costs and contracts are the most complex. These should only be considered when the event level or visibility truly requires them.

Site Visits

Once you've identified a venue that appears to meet your event's size and type, the next step is a site visit. A contract alone won't tell you whether the space will truly function for a *FIRST* Tech Challenge tournament – only walking the site will.

A site visit gives you the chance to:

Table 17: Site Visit Checkpoints

Checkpoint	Key Point	Why It Matters
Layout	Confirm the venue can safely accommodate pits, fields, judging, and audience areas.	Ensures the event can physically fit and operate without creating safety hazards.

Checkpoint	Key Point	Why It Matters
Flow & Accessibility	Ensure traffic flow and accessibility work for teams, volunteers, and spectators.	Smooth movement prevents congestion and supports ADA compliance.
Technical Infrastructure	Verify power, lighting, and networking meet the demands of your event level.	Avoids disruptions caused by insufficient or unreliable technical capacity.
Hidden Costs & Limitations	Identify restrictions (load-in, overnight power, etc.) that may affect contracts.	Prevents surprise expenses and logistical challenges on event day.

Venue size and type tell you if an event could fit on paper; a site visit tells you if it will work in practice.

The following sections outline two areas to focus on during site visits:

- **Layout Considerations** – how pits, fields, judging, and audience spaces interact.
- **Technical Requirements** – the infrastructure needed to support smooth operations.

Layout Considerations

Before signing a contract, it’s important to understand how your event will physically fit into the venue. The layout is not about exact table placement – it’s about whether the venue can accommodate the flow of teams, robots, and spectators in a safe and functional way. A venue may meet the raw square footage needs, but still fail if pits, fields, and audience areas cannot coexist safely and efficiently.

Always sketch a draft layout during your site visit. Walk the paths teams will take – pits → queue → field → exit → pits. If it feels cramped, confusing, or unsafe, the venue may not be the right fit.

Table 18: Core Components to Consider in Layout

Area	Key Questions to Ask	Why It Matters
Pits	Is there enough space for 8’x8’ team pits with aisles wide enough for carts? Can power be distributed safely if required?	Cramped pits or narrow aisles create safety hazards and accessibility issues.
Arena	Is there space for fields, Referees, and queuing without blocking traffic?	Even with enough square footage, poor field placement can disrupt match flow.
Audience	Can spectators be kept at least 10 feet from the field? Is there adequate seating?	Protects field operations and ensures a good experience for families and guests.
Traffic Flow	Are there natural routes between pits, fields, judging, concessions, and restrooms? Can robot and audience traffic be separated?	Prevents bottlenecks, protects equipment, and keeps matches on schedule.

Area	Key Questions to Ask	Why It Matters
Accessibility	Are pits, fields, and judging rooms accessible without stairs or narrow halls? Is there an accessible load-in?	Ensures compliance with ADA and equitable participation for all.
Expansion	If the event grows, can a second field, more pits, or extra seating be added?	Protects long-term viability and helps future-proof the event.

While **event level** influences the formality of roles and requirements, when it comes to **layout**, the most reliable planning factor is event size. The number of teams directly shapes how much space is needed, how traffic must be managed, and whether separate zones are required. A small event may fit comfortably in a single gym, while a large event requires intentional zoning to keep pits, fields, and spectators functioning smoothly. The table below highlights common layout approaches and pitfalls by event size.

Table 19: Relationship between Size and Layout

Event Size	Layout Focus	Common Pitfalls
Small (<24 teams)	Single-room setup often works. Ensure pits don't crowd the field and traffic paths are marked.	Overlapping pit/field space creates noise and congestion.
Medium (25–36 teams)	Separate pit and field areas improve flow. Look for adjacent rooms for judging.	Long walks between spaces, especially if in different buildings.
Large (48-72+ teams)	Zoning is essential: dedicated pit hall, multiple fields, formal seating, distinct robot pathways.	Venues with enough square footage but poor adjacency (e.g., pits in one building, arena across campus).

Technical Requirements

Reliable infrastructure is the foundation of a successful tournament. Power, lighting, and technical systems all affect how smoothly the event runs. These requirements scale with event level and size. Walking the site with venue staff and your FTA before finalizing venue selection ensures that critical technical needs are identified and addressed early.

A site visit allows the Event Director and FTA to:

- Verify power availability and distribution (pit, field, AV).
- Identify where outlets, breakers, and drops are located.
- Confirm network/internet access points and potential interference.
- Check lighting consistency in the field, pit, and judging spaces.
- Meet with venue staff to clarify day-of responsibilities.

This section focuses on the requirements to confirm during a site visit. The table below highlights the high-level technical requirements for Level 0 – Level 2 events that should be considered when conducting a site visit. This is not a comprehensive list of technical requirements, nor does it go in depth on networking needs. For detailed planning of networking requirements please review [FTC Wi-Fi Event Guide](#). For how equipment is configured, operated, and troubleshoot, see the Technical Operations section of this guide, as well as the [FTA Manual](#).

The *FIRST* Technical Advisor (FTA) owns technical delivery of an event but Event Director must ensure the venue has what's needed in the contract. For detailed setup and troubleshooting, refer to the [\[FTA Manual\]](#) and the [FTC Wi-Fi Event Guide](#).

Table 20: Technical Requirements for Levels of Events

Area	Level 0 – Scrimmage / Off-Season	Level 1 – League Meet / Qualifier / League Tournament	Level 2 – Regional Championship / Large Qualifier
		Everything in Level 0, plus:	Everything in Level 1, plus:
Electricity	1 × 20-amp circuit for scoring table only.	Pit Admin: standard wall outlet.	One duplex outlet per pit table (dedicated drop, 60–100 amps for full pit).
	No pit power; provide shared charging stations for teams.	Competition field: 60–100 amp drop.	One duplex outlet per practice field.
		Robot inspection area: standard outlet.	Judges’ deliberation room: outlet + optional internet drop.
		Registration & admin: standard outlet.	Power for AV/production and food service areas.
			Plan for overnight pit power or communicate shutdown policy.
Networking / Wi-Fi	Not required.	Dedicated scoring network (wired or Wi-Fi).	Dedicated scoring network (wired strongly recommended).
	Use FTC-Live locally for practice, no internet needed.	Coordinate with venue IT to avoid interference.	Reserve non-overlapping channels (per Wi-Fi Event Planning Guide).
		Internet optional, but helpful for scoring sync and live updates.	Coordinate with any FRC event onsite to avoid conflicts.
			Internet strongly encouraged for live updates/streaming.
			Confirm venue IT contact for day-of support.
Lighting	Basic room lighting is sufficient.	Consistent lighting across pits, field, and judging rooms (judging rooms are not needed for league meets)	Bright, consistent lighting across entire venue.
	Ensure field is evenly lit enough for driver visibility.	Check for glare/shadows in the field area.	Ensure judging rooms are private, quiet, and evenly lit.

Area	Level 0 – Scrimmage / Off-Season	Level 1 – League Meet / Qualifier / League Tournament	Level 2 – Regional Championship / Large Qualifier
			Confirm AV/production lighting does not interfere with robot vision

Venue Services

Only after you’ve confirmed that a venue’s size, type, and layout can support your event should you dig into **venue services**. These are the operational details that often decide whether a venue is truly workable. Custodial staffing, parking rules, IT support, and security may look minor compared to square footage, but in practice they can drive both your budget and the smoothness of event day.

Always dig deeper than the rental fee. A “free” school gym can end up costing more than a university arena if you’re hit with custodial overtime, food restrictions, or hidden parking fees.

Table 21: Required venue services

Requirement Area	What to Confirm	Notes / Questions
Custodial & Trash	Who cleans before, during, and after?	Is janitorial service included or an added fee?
Auxiliary Resources and equipment	Who is providing tables and chairs for the event? Is pipe and drape need? Does the venue have office resources (such as printers) that can be used by the event?	What equipment or resources can the venue provide as part of this event?
Food & Vendors	Are outside food or vendors allowed?	Does the venue require approved vendors only?
Parking	Bus/overflow/volunteer parking	Are there extra fees for buses or reserved lots?
Key Contacts	Who unlocks doors, manages IT, handles AV?	Identify a day-of primary contact
Insurance	Certificate of Insurance (COI)	Who provides it? The Program Delivery Organization or the host site?
Union / Labor	AV, electrical, custodial labor rules	Will union staffing affect cost/schedule?
Security & Safety	Venue-provided staff vs. event responsibility	Is overnight security or full day EMT coverage required?

In some states, certain venues – including schools, colleges, municipal centers, or commercial arenas – operate under union or labor agreements. This may affect costs for custodial work, AV support, or equipment setup. Always confirm whether the venue is a union facility early in the contracting process so any associated costs can be budgeted and planned for.

Safety & Emergency Planning

Safety and security should be considered from the very beginning of venue selection. Every facility brings its own emergency plans, staffing requirements, and procedures – these will shape your event’s own safety plan. Think of the venue as the “first layer” of safety: your job is to understand it, document it, and adapt it for the tournament.

Safety and Security requirements for events may vary region to region depending on local government and PDP requirements. While this section focuses on thinking about safety from the venue perspective, PDPs may have regional requirements for safety and security that Event Directors may need to take into account as they are working with the event. For level 1 and 2 events make sure to consult with your PDP.

Venue Safety Plan

When selecting a venue, confirm the basics of how emergencies are handled. These details will form the backbone of your event’s safety documentation.

Table 22: Safety Plan Considerations

Area	Questions to Ask the Venue	Why It Matters
Emergency Exits & Evacuation	Where are the exits located? Is there a posted evacuation map?	Maps should be provided to teams and volunteers for compliance.
Fire Safety	Where are extinguishers located? What are the fire safety mechanisms in place (are there just alarms or is there also a sprinkler system?)	Ensures readiness and avoids last-minute inspection issues.
Severe Weather / Shelter	Where do people go in case of tornado or shelter-in-place?	Critical for regions with weather risks; must be communicated in advance.
Medical Support	Is there an on-site nurse, EMT, or contracted service?	Determines whether you need to budget for additional first-aid coverage.
Venue Emergency Contact	Who is the primary contact for incidents during the event?	Clear escalation path prevents delays during emergencies.

Area	Questions to Ask the Venue	Why It Matters
Accessibility	Are facilities ADA-compliant? What accommodations are available?	Ensures equitable participation and compliance with local law.

Safety and Security Resources

Every venue comes with different safety and security resources they can provide for an event. Event Directors should work with the venue contact to understand safety and security resources that can be provided and what resources need to be committed above and beyond what the venue is able to provide.

Table 23: Safety Resources

Resource	Primary Role in an Emergency	What the Event Team Needs to Know
Venue Security / Custodial	First point of contact for building access, crowd movement, and enforcement of venue rules.	Identify the supervisor and confirm how to reach them during the event.
Law Enforcement	Responds to major safety/security incidents (theft, threats, disturbances).	Clarify whether an officer will be on-site or on-call; know the expected response time.
Medical / EMT	Provides immediate care for injuries or illness.	Confirm location of first aid staff and how EMS is called if needed.
Event Staff / Key Volunteers	Manage team/volunteer communications and direct traffic during incidents.	Define how event staff will integrate with venue/public safety personnel.

Pre-Event Coordination

Before the event, the Event Director (or designated safety lead) should meet with venue leadership and public safety contacts. These meetings should confirm:

- How emergencies will be reported and communicated (radio, phone, text).
- Where staff will gather during an incident (command post or office).
- Who has final authority to make safety decisions (venue vs. ED vs. security).
- How evacuation or shelter-in-place instructions will be communicated to teams and spectators.

FIRST provides an **Event Safety/Emergency Response Best Practices Checklist (Rev. 10/2024)** as part of the Volunteer Resource Library. PDPs may also issue region-specific safety plan templates that must be followed.

Documentation

All venue safety information should be compiled into a written **Event Safety Plan** that includes:

- Maps of emergency exits, extinguishers, AEDs, and shelter areas.
- Venue-provided procedures (fire, severe weather, lockdown).
- Evacuation and communication strategies.
- Contact information for venue supervisors, public safety, and medical staff.

This document should be shared with the PDP and planning committee before the event and posted or distributed where teams and volunteers can easily access it.

Selecting a venue is also selecting its safety plan. By confirming emergency procedures, clarifying required security resources, and documenting agreements in advance, Event Directors ensure the tournament is built on a safe and stable foundation. Later sections on **Incident & Emergency Management** will expand on how to implement these plans during the event.

Venue Contracting

Once you’ve confirmed that the venue meets your size requirements, offers a workable type, includes manageable services, and meets your technical needs you can move into contracting. The contracting step is about clarity – confirming dates, insurance, services, costs, and cancellation terms – so both you and the venue have aligned expectations.

The formality of this process varies by venue. At a high school, a principal’s approval may be all you need. At a college, you might sign a short rental agreement. At a convention center, expect a lengthy contract with line-item costs. The earlier you establish clarity, the smoother your event will run.

Some venues operate with formal rental policies and contracts, while others may provide in-kind donations that reduce or eliminate costs. In every case, the goal is the same: clarity. Knowing in advance what is included, what may carry extra costs, and who your point of contact is will prevent surprise

At any venue, contracting comes down to clarifying expectations:

Table 24: Venue contract key areas for alignment

Step	Why It Matters	Questions to Ask
Confirm Dates & Access	Prevents conflicts and ensures setup time.	What time can we load in and out? Who unlocks doors?
Clarify Services	Avoids hidden costs.	Is custodial overtime included? Is AV support extra?
Verify Insurance	Protects both you and the venue.	Does the venue require a Certificate of Insurance? Who provides it—the PDP or the host site?
Identify Key Contacts	Ensures smooth communication.	Who is the IT, AV, or facilities contact on event day?
Determine Cancellation Policy	Creates an understanding of expectations for cancelling a venue or what types of events may	What is the venues cancellation policy? What types of events (such as weather) may impact an event and what is the venues process for handling weather related cancellations?

Step	Why It Matters	Questions to Ask
Understand Venue Safety and Security policies	Allows you to plan safety and security management around venue policies	What is the venues safety and security plan in place? Where are exits?
Document Costs	Keeps budgets predictable	Is the space donated, discounted, or a full-

Cancellation Policies

Every event is vulnerable to disruptions – weather closures, district shutdowns, or last-minute emergencies. What matters most is how difficult an event will be to reschedule and what protections you have in place with the venue. Cancellation is not just a financial issue; it affects teams’ travel, volunteer commitments, and advancement integrity. In the table below we provide insight into how cancelation policies and practices may impact the different levels of events.

While this lives in the contracting section as an important consideration when dealing with venue selection and contracting, cancellation poses large logistical concerns that go beyond venue considerations. When it comes to level 1 and level 2 events the PDP should be consulted if there appears to be an issue that may lead to the cancellation of an event. Event Directors should inform the PDP, and should not make decisions on steps forward on their own.

Common example: If a league meet is being cancelled due to snowy weather, the PDP should be actively involved in how to manage the cancellation and decisions around: developing contingency scenarios (such as rescheduling or relocating) and establishing a plan for communicating this to teams and volunteers

Table 25: Cancelation Policies and Impact

Event Level	Typical Event Types	Cancellation Impact	Venue Expectations
Level 0	Scrimmages, Off-season	Low impact – events can often be rescheduled or relocated with minimal disruption.	In-kind school or community spaces acceptable, even if cancellation is possible on short notice.
Level 1	League Meets, League Tournaments, Qualifiers	Moderate impact – cancellations disrupt advancement fairness and schedules.	Venue should have predictable access; ED should coordinate closely with PDP on contingency plans.
Level 2	Regional Championships	High impact – difficult to reschedule; affects travel, advancement, and season integrity.	Contracted venues with clearly defined, limited cancellation terms. Avoid in-kind spaces with low control.

Event Level	Typical Event Types	Cancellation Impact	Venue Expectations
Level 3	Premier Events, FIRST Championship	Very high impact – nearly impossible to reschedule; significant reputational and financial risk.	Professional venues with formal contracts, strong cancellation protections, and high reliability.

Smaller events can tolerate flexibility. Larger advancing events demand certainty. Event Directors must understand a venue’s cancellation policy *and* coordinate with their PDP to ensure that risks are identified, managed, and communicated.

Schedule

Once a venue is selected, the next foundation of event infrastructure is the schedule. If the venue provides the stage, the schedule is the script – directing when teams arrive, when judges and referees begin their work, and when volunteers take breaks. It is the rhythm that carries the tournament from doors open to closing ceremony.

For a first-time Event Director, scheduling can feel daunting. But it is less about perfection and more about structure. A well-planned schedule builds confidence for everyone: teams know when to travel, volunteers can pace their energy, and families and sponsors see an event that runs smoothly. A poorly planned schedule, by contrast, creates stress that ripples through every role.

Every event is unique, and regional practice may vary. Event Directors should consult their Program Delivery Partner (PDP) early to confirm local expectations and align on schedule length, match counts, and judging practices.

Core Scheduling Documents

Several documents communicate the schedule outward, each serving a different audience:

- **Event Schedule** – A public-facing timeline published weeks in advance.
- **Judging Schedule** – Defines when each team meets with a panel. Not needed for League Meet events.
- **Match Schedule** – Sets the order of play, generated once inspections are complete.
- **Inspection Schedule (optional)** – Used at larger events to reduce morning bottlenecks.

This section focuses on how to build the overall event schedule. For guidance on creating judging schedules, inspection schedules, or match schedules, see the dedicated resources linked in the Important Tools section.

Together, these documents share the plan, but the work of building the schedule comes first. Identifying the core blocks of time, testing them against venue hours, assembling a skeleton, and layering in the detail that makes a tournament day run.

Building the Event Schedule

A tournament schedule develops gradually across the event lifecycle. Early in planning, it begins as a rough outline that reflects venue hours, inspection and judging blocks, and projected match time. As

the event approaches, that outline is refined into a complete timeline that integrates volunteer reporting, check-in deadlines, realistic cycle times, and ceremonies.

The process of building a schedule follows a consistent sequence:

1. Identify the **core blocks** of time that anchor the day.
2. Use **formulas** to calculate how much time each block requires.
3. Assemble those blocks into a **skeleton schedule** that shows the rough flow of the day.
4. Add detail to transform the skeleton into a full event plan.
5. Adapt the structure to the **scale and level** of the event.

Core Scheduling Blocks and Planning Formulas

The table below outlines the standard planning assumptions for a **mid-sized Level 1 event** (such as a 24-team qualifier). Actual times will vary depending on event size, advancement level, and number of fields or judging panels.

Table 26: Common Planning Formulas for Schedule

Block	Definition	Planning Guidance	Formula / Calculation	Notes / Scaling Considerations
Venue Access	The hours the venue is open to the event.	Establish start and end times early with the facility. All other blocks must fit within these boundaries.	N/A	Schedule design and venue access must be developed in tandem; neither can be finalized independently.
Judging	Team interviews with judging panels. Included in Level 1 and higher Tournament events but not League Meets.	Minimum 20 minutes per team (10 with team, 10 for notes). Best practice: 25–30 minutes per slot.	$\text{Slot Length} \times \text{Teams} \div \text{Panels} = \text{Total Time}$ <i>Ex: 30 min × 24 teams ÷ 3 panels = 240 min (4 hrs)</i>	All interviews must finish before qualification matches begin.
Inspection	Robot compliance checks prior to matches.	All teams must complete inspection before play begins.	N/A	Small events may overlap inspections with judging. Larger events may publish inspection slots to reduce bottlenecks.

Block	Definition	Planning Guidance	Formula / Calculation	Notes / Scaling Considerations
Practice Matches	Optional opportunity to practice match process/gameplay.	Recommend planning 1 match per team with a longer cycle time than Qualification Matches. This typically should be scheduled in parallel to other activities like Inspection.	Teams × 1 Match ÷ 4 = Total Matches	+1 min to qual cycle (below)
Qualification Matches	Required match play for all teams.	Each team plays 5–6 matches. Cycle time includes queuing, introductions, play, reset, and buffer.	$\frac{\text{Total Matches} \times \text{Cycle Time}}{60} = \text{Hours of Play}$ <i>Ex: 12 teams × 5 matches = 60 ÷ 4 = 15 matches × 10 min = 150 min (2.5 hrs)</i>	Typical cycle assumptions: Single field ≈ 7 min/match; Dual fields ≈ 6 min/match.
Ceremonies & Meetings	Formal moments that structure the competition.	Drivers' Meeting (10–15 min), Opening Ceremony (varies by scope), Alliance Selection (~20 min for mid-size events).	N/A	Length scales with event level and production expectations.

Block	Definition	Planning Guidance	Formula / Calculation	Notes / Scaling Considerations
Playoffs and Awards Ceremony	Final elimination rounds for robot match play and award ceremony integrated together. Included in Level 1 and higher Tournament events but not League Meets.	Timing for playoffs and awards depends on size of event.		Competition Manual Section 13.7 Playoff Matches provides guidance on how to manage playoffs and suggestions on timing for different sizes of events such as a minute by minute breakdown of the award and playoff schedule
Meals & Breaks	Planned downtime for teams, spectators, and volunteers.	Provide at least 30 minutes for lunch.	N/A	Larger/longer events should also schedule short volunteer breaks in the morning and afternoon.
Buffer Time	Flexible blocks to absorb unexpected delays.	Build 15–30 minutes of buffer into the schedule.	N/A	Distribute throughout the day rather than holding all time until the end.

Assemble the Skeleton Schedule

With the blocks and formulas in place, the next step is to assemble them into a skeleton that shows the broad flow of the day. At this stage, the goal is not minute-by-minute detail, but a test fit of major activities against venue hours.

Table 27: Example Skeleton (Early Planning)

Time	Agenda
7:15 am	Venue Access Begins
8:30 am	Judging & Inspection
10:40 am	Drivers' Meeting & Opening Ceremony
11:00 am	Qualification Matches
12:00 pm	Lunch
12:45 pm	Qualification Matches
3:50 pm	Qualification Matches Projected End
4:00 pm	Alliance Selection
4:20 pm	Awards Ceremony and Playoffs
7:00 pm	Venue Access Ends

Layer on More Detail

As the event approaches, the outline evolves into a detailed plan. Volunteer reporting, check-in deadlines, and match schedule generation are added, along with refined cycle-time assumptions.

The Schedule below is the standard sample schedule for *FIRST* Tech Challenge and can also be referenced in the Important Tools section. The schedule can and should evolve beyond this, but ideally all Level 1 events should present a similar public schedule to the one below.

Table 28: Example Detailed Schedule (Level 1 Qualifier)

Time	Agenda
7:15 am	Doors Open for Staff & Key Volunteers
7:30 am	Judges and Inspectors Report
8:00 am	Doors Open for Teams
8:30 am	Judging & Inspection Commences
9:00 am	Practice Matches Start
10:15 am	Team Check-in Hard Deadline (<u>Check the Competition Manual</u>)
10:30 am	Match schedule is generated and distributed to teams. (<u>Check the Competition Manual</u>) <i>Note to Scorekeeper: 6 Matches total (Check the Competition Manual)</i>
10:40 am	Drivers' Meeting with Head Referee & Opening Ceremony
11:00 am	Qualification Matches 1 - 8 <i>Note to Scorekeeper: 7-minute cycle-time</i>
12:00 pm	Lunch
12:45 pm	Qualification Matches 9 - 45 <i>Note to Scorekeeper: 5-minute cycle-times</i>
3:50 pm	Qualification Matches Projected End
4:00 pm	Alliance Selection
4:20 pm	Double Elimination Rounds 1 - 4
5:10 pm	Award Ceremonies Start & Double Eliminations Round 5
6:20 pm	Projected End of Event
7:00 pm	Doors Close
<i>Occasionally things that happen out of the event's control may impact the schedule. In these cases, work closely with the Event Director to understand the updated agenda.</i>	

Scale for Event Level

The same core blocks – venue access, judging, inspection, matches, ceremonies, meals, and buffer – exist at almost every *FIRST* Tech Challenge event (with some exceptions such as League Meets not having judging, awards, or playoffs). What changes from one level to the next is not which blocks are present, but how much structure and polish is applied to them.

At the lowest levels, schedules are flexible and simplified, designed more as practice opportunities than formal competitions. As events scale up, the same blocks are implemented with increasing precision: inspections are coordinated to prevent bottlenecks, judging is scheduled across multiple panels, matches are paced for larger team counts, and ceremonies evolve into more polished productions.

Regional championships and premier-level events do not add fundamentally new requirements, but they do demand a higher degree of coordination and professionalism. The schedule becomes less about simply fitting all activities into a day and more about managing flow, pacing, and participant experience at scale.

The table below summarizes how core blocks are applied at different event levels:

Table 29: Schedule Blocks by Scale of Event

Event Level	Event Type(s)	How Core Blocks Are Applied	Notes
Level 0	Scrimmages & Off-Season	Core blocks are present in simplified form. Inspections may be informal, judging optional, ceremonies minimal. Matches used to test cycle times and flow.	Training ground for teams and volunteers. Often half-day and flexible, not tied to advancement.
Level 1	League Meets	League Meets have a different core block structure from other types of official events. At a League Meet teams participate in inspection, drivers meeting and 5–6 matches per team, but League Meets do not include judging, Alliance Selection, playoffs or award ceremony.	Judging and Playoffs take place for a League take place at the League Tournament event. League Meets are focused on qualification match play.
Level 1	Qualifiers & League Tournaments	All core blocks are required and clearly defined: inspections before matches, judging completed in structured slots, 5–6 matches per team, and standard ceremonies.	Establishes baseline fairness and consistency. These obligations support advancement and are the minimum expectation for official competition.
Level 2	Regional Championships	Core blocks mirror Level 1 but delivered with more precision and polish. Judging and inspections are coordinated more tightly, matches managed to pace larger team counts, and ceremonies expanded for visibility.	Obligations are not fundamentally different, but execution quality is higher. Volunteer scheduling and pacing become more deliberate.

Event Level	Event Type(s)	How Core Blocks Are Applied	Notes
Level 3	Premier Events & <i>FIRST</i> Championship	Core blocks are executed at the highest level of structure and integration. Timelines are tightly coordinated across roles, activities, and multiple days. Ceremonies are elevated to showcase standards.	Represents the most professional delivery standard in FTC. Designed for consistency, participant experience, and visibility to the broader community.

Layout

The way an event is laid out sets the foundation for the rest of the event. A clear, intentional venue layout helps ensure safe traffic flow, smooth match operations, and a positive experience for teams, volunteers, and spectators. Maps and layouts are more than logistics—they provide the shared infrastructure that keeps an event organized and predictable. Please review the [Layout Considerations](#) section for specifics on how to factor layout into your site visits and planning.

Materials and Procurement

Running a *FIRST* Tech Challenge event requires a wide range of supplies – from electronics and field hardware to print materials and basic office items. Having the right equipment in the right place at the right time is what keeps the event moving smoothly. See the [Event Resources](#) pages for helpful material and equipment lists. Event Directors should already be thinking about how materials are sourced, transported, and organized. Clear procurement planning helps avoid last-minute gaps and ensures volunteers can focus on running the event instead of scrambling for supplies.

Trophies and Recognition

Recognition for teams and volunteers needs to be planned well ahead of the event to plan time for shipping.

Event Trophies and Banners may be ordered by the PDP or the Event Director. For tournaments in the United States, trophies should be order from the *FIRST* Tech Challenge [Sports Awards](#) page. Tournaments outside of the United States may use locally sourced trophies of equal or better quality. All events are encouraged to use the official trophies or identical version for Regional Championship events.

Any time Inspire banners are given out, the Winning Alliance should also receive Event Winner banners. Banners can be purchased from [SLI](#).

Event Hospitality and Culture

Once the scope and infrastructure of an event are defined, the next question is not just what will happen but how it will feel for the people involved. Hospitality is the lens we use to describe that experience. It covers communication, team support, volunteer management, and cultural touches – the everyday interactions that turn logistics into community.

Thinking about hospitality early keeps it from becoming an afterthought. Meals, communication timelines, and volunteer recruitment aren’t extras; they are core planning choices that shape whether participants arrive confident, cared for, and ready to contribute. For new Event Directors, this section

provides a starting framework. For experienced committees, it offers a way to refine and scale practices.

Hospitality is shared work. PDPs set expectations, planning committees adapt local practices, and EDs and VCs guide execution. Everyone contributes, because no single person can create the event culture alone.

The following sections break down hospitality into four focus areas – communication, team management, volunteer management, and event culture – showing how each connects to the overall story of your tournament.

Table 30: Event Hospitality and Culture Section Map

Section	What It Focuses On	Why It Matters
Setting the Tone with Communication	How tone, timing, and consistency in messages shape the participant experience long before event day.	Communication is the first act of hospitality – it lowers stress, builds trust, and signals to every participant that they matter.
Team Management	How teams are registered, assigned, and supported with clear, timely communication through the event lifecycle.	Teams are the core of FTC. When processes are transparent and communication is reliable, students and mentors can focus on competing and learning.
Volunteer Management	How to recruit, assign, and prepare volunteers while ensuring compliance and recognition.	Volunteers are the backbone of the event. A strong plan keeps roles filled, builds culture, and sustains capacity year after year.
Creating an Event Culture through Hospitality	How to cover essentials, add enhancements, and weave in cultural practices that make events memorable.	Essentials ensure respect and functionality; enhancements and culture transform tournaments into celebrations of community and the ethos of FIRST.

Setting the Tone with Communication

Hospitality begins with communication. Long before anyone walks into the venue, the tone and timing of messages shape how teams, volunteers, and guests experience the event. More than logistics, communication is the first act of hospitality: it lowers stress, builds trust, and signals to every participant – *You matter here*. Consistent and thoughtful communication sets the tone for the event and creates the sense of community that defines a successful experience.

Table 31: Three Principles of Communication in Hospitality

Principle	What It Means	Why It Matters
Communication is cumulative	Each message builds on the last. Once an early detail is unclear or missed, later updates cannot fully repair the stress it caused.	Establishes a rhythm of trust. Teams and volunteers feel secure when they see consistency across all stages.

Principle	What It Means	Why It Matters
Tone conveys value	The wording and style of even a simple reminder can make participants feel welcomed or overlooked.	Signals respect. Warm, inclusive language strengthens culture and encourages positive engagement.
Events differ, but needs align	While scale and logistics vary between a small meet and a championship, participants always rely on timely, clear, and consistent messaging.	Reinforces shared expectations. Reduces uncertainty across all groups – teams, volunteers, sponsors, and guests.

Team Management

Teams are the core of every *FIRST* Tech Challenge (FTC) event. A well-run tournament doesn't just provide a field of play – it provides a structured, positive, and welcoming experience that supports students, mentors, and families from the moment assignments are made until the last award is handed out. Team management is therefore both an administrative process and a hospitality function: ensuring eligibility, maintaining clear communication, and providing strong onsite support.

This section outlines how teams are assigned and registered and what communication looks like leading up to the event. Because these processes vary by region, the Program Delivery Partner (PDP) holds primary responsibility for team assignment and eligibility, while Event Directors and their committees focus on execution and direct team support.

Registration and Assignment

For teams, the journey into competition has two inseparable parts: registration and assignment. Registration establishes a team's eligibility to compete; assignment determines where that competition will happen. Both are responsibilities of the Program Delivery Partner (PDP), with Event Directors providing support.

Registration: Becoming Event Ready

The common first step in a team's event journey is registration – a process that has two layers: the global **FIRST Season Registration** and the local **Program Delivery Organization (PDO) Registration**

The PDO is the organization that holds the agreement with *FIRST* to operate the program in that region, and the Program Delivery Partner (PDP) is the lead contact responsible for oversight.

Table 32: Typical Registration Process for Teams

FIRST Season Registration
<p>Every team must register through the official <i>FIRST</i> Team Registration System. To be considered eligible (“event-ready”), teams must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create/login to their FIRST account 2. Pay the Season Registration Fee to FIRST. Teams outside of the US, Mexico and Canada don’t have a fee, but must log into their dashboard to indicate they are a returning team for the current season. 3. Have both Lead Coach/Mentor 1 and 2 complete the required Youth Protection screening (or the equivalent process outside North America). 4. Be in good standing in the FIRST system
Regional / Program Delivery Organization (PDO) Registration
<p>After completing FIRST registration, teams complete regional registration with their PDO. This step varies by partner but often includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payment of event-specific or region-specific fees. • Submission of local consent/release forms or compliance documents. • Acknowledgement of regional advancement or hosting policies.

Assignment: Where Teams Compete

Once registration is confirmed, teams look for the answer that defines their season: *Where are we competing?* Assignment practices vary, but the guiding principles are fairness, transparency, and clarity.

Ways PDPs May Assign Teams:

- **Geographic proximity** – placing teams at events near their school or community.
- **Balancing team density** – spreading teams across multiple events to avoid overloading a single site.
- **Sign-up models** – allowing limited “first come, first served” choices for events like scrimmages or off-season tournaments.
- **Bundled registration** – combining regional registration and assignment into a single step, where teams register locally and immediately receive their event placement.

Table 33: Responsibility for team assignment to events

Event Level	Event Type(s)	Who Assigns Teams	Notes
Level 0	Scrimmages & Off-Season Events	Event Host (if unofficial) or PDP (if endorsed)	Team participation is flexible; not tied to advancement.
Level 1	Qualifiers & Leagues	PDP	PDP assigns teams to events, balancing geography, team density, and capacity.

Event Level	Event Type(s)	Who Assigns Teams	Notes
Level 2	Regional Championship Tournaments	Natural Advancement (from Level 1 events)	Teams advance based on performance, per Competition Manual advancement criteria. PDP manages invitations.
Level 3	Premier Events & FIRST Championship	Natural Advancement (from Level 2 events)	Teams advance from Regionals. PDP confirms invitations; FIRST manages Championship registration.

From the team perspective, clarity is everything: When will we know our assignment? What criteria are being used? What happens if we advance? Consistent, well-timed answers to these questions reduce stress and help teams plan confidently.

This information is included in this document to provide context on how this process works. The PDP is the main responsible party for determining registration and assignment for official events.

Team Communication

Once teams are registered and assigned, their focus turns to readiness: *What do we need to know to be prepared?* Every message an event sends is not just logistical—it is experiential. Communication is the bridge between registration and participation, shaping whether teams approach the event with confidence or uncertainty.

Effective communication has three defining qualities:

- **Timeliness** – Teams need information early enough to plan travel, volunteers, and resources.
- **Clarity** – Messages must translate into concrete action without ambiguity.
- **Consistency** – Information must align across all sources so teams know what to trust.

The same facts can either lower stress or amplify it, depending on how and when they are conveyed. For Event Directors, communication is therefore not simply about providing details but about managing expectations and affirming that teams are valued participants.

Once teams are assigned, communication becomes a shared responsibility: the PDP may handle formal announcements, while Event Directors contribute.

The table below summarizes a typical communication arc for FIRST Tech Challenge events. While details vary by region and event level, the progression illustrates how staged messaging lowers uncertainty and supports teams throughout the lifecycle of an event.

Table 34: Suggested Team Communication Timeline

Stage	What Teams Receive	Why It Matters
Registration / Assignment	Confirmation of placement, event details, and next steps	Establishes certainty at the start of the season.
4–6 Weeks Before Event	Welcome message with basics: venue, format, hotels	Enables teams to plan travel, budgets, and volunteer commitments.
2–3 Weeks Before Event	Information packet with pit map, parking, and safety notes	Reduces last-minute confusion and sets shared expectations.
1 Week Before Event	Final schedule and logistics update	Confirms stability of details, preventing disruptive surprises.
2–3 Days Before Event	Reminder with arrival instructions and emergency contact	Keeps attention on readiness during the final countdown.
Post-Event	Thank-you message and advancement notifications	Closes the loop, recognizes effort, and signals what comes next.

Volunteer Management

This section guides you through the full volunteer lifecycle: how to recruit and share responsibility for building the team, how to confirm compliance and make assignments official in the Volunteer Management System (VMS), and how to communicate in ways that prepare and support volunteers at every step. For new Event Directors and Volunteer Coordinators, it offers a framework to get started; for experienced committees, it provides tools to refine and scale practices.

Volunteer management is shared work. The Volunteer Coordinator may carry the day-to-day process, but success depends on the Event Director, Program Delivery Partner, and Key Volunteers/Planning Committee each contributing their networks and expertise. No single person can do it alone, and no event succeeds without a team effort.

VMS is the official system for managing volunteers at *FIRST* events. It verifies Youth Protection (YPP) clearance, records training and certifications, and makes role assignments official. While spreadsheets or other tools may help organize along the way, only VMS ties volunteers to compliance and produces the confirmations they need. When working in VMS, remember you are handling personally identifiable information (PII). Always follow the *FIRST* Privacy Policy: limit access to only those who need it, secure any exports, and remove them when no longer required. Protecting volunteer data is both a compliance requirement and a core act of hospitality.

Table 35: Volunteer Management Section Map

Section	What It Focuses On	Why It Matters
Recruitment	How to identify needs, share responsibility, and build a pipeline of volunteers	Recruitment sets the tone for culture and ensures the event has the right people in the right roles
Assignment & Compliance	Using VMS to verify YPP, confirm training, and make assignments official	Protects youth, ensures fairness, and gives volunteers clarity about their role
Communication	Providing timely, clear, and welcoming information before the event	Communication is hospitality in action – it lowers stress and builds confidence

Volunteer Recruitment

Recruitment is the foundation of volunteer management. A tournament cannot run without people – and the way those people are found, engaged, and supported sets the tone for the event itself. More than filling slots, recruitment is about building a team culture. Volunteers need to know why they matter, how their role connects to the mission, and who they can turn to for support. In that sense, recruitment is the first act of volunteer management – and the first test of leadership for an event’s planning committee.

Volunteers are the culture carriers: their tone and enthusiasm shape how teams experience the event. Key Volunteers provide the operational backbone – Judge Advisor, Head Referee, FTA, Lead Scorekeeper, and Pit Admin Supervisor anchor both planning and delivery. And momentum builds quickly: once a few trusted volunteers commit, others often follow through referrals or shadowing. Recruitment is the spark that sets everything else in motion.

Because of this, recruitment should never rest on one person’s shoulders. Success depends on shared responsibility across the Volunteer Coordinator (VC), Event Director (ED), Program Delivery Partner (PDP), and Key Volunteers, each bringing their own networks and expertise. When the load is shared, the pool becomes broader, more diverse, and more resilient.

Recruitment also works best when treated as a step-by-step process rather than a single task. Each stage builds on the last – starting with clarity about what the event needs, layering in commitments over time, and investing in sustainability for future seasons. The table below previews the stages covered in this section.

Table 36: Stages of Volunteer Recruitment

Step	Focus	What You'll Learn
1. Define What You Need	Scope the event and identify key roles	Using VMS role targets, prioritizing Key Volunteers, and matching numbers to event size
2. Create the Recruitment Timeline	Plan recruitment in waves	When to begin, who to recruit first, and how to layer commitments
3. Start with Known Networks	Begin with the people closest to the program	PDP lists, returning volunteers, and committee contacts
4. Expand to Wider Audiences	Broaden your reach	Engaging alumni, sponsors, parents, colleges, and civic groups
5. Use Effective Recruitment Channels	Reach people through the right platforms	Direct asks, social media, corporate portals, newsletters, and onsite promotion
6. Build for the Future	Sustain volunteer capacity year after year	Recognition, shadowing, succession planning, and committee ownership

Share Responsibility for Recruitment

Recruitment works best when it is not carried by one person alone. While the Volunteer Coordinator (VC) manages the process day to day, the reality is that every major event leader has a role to play in bringing the right people to the table. The Event Director (ED) ensures coverage by leveraging networks and keeping the big picture in mind. The Program Delivery Partner (PDP) provides regional oversight, access to specialized pools, and standards that must be met. Key Volunteers, like Judge Advisors or Head Referees, strengthen the pipeline by drawing on their own professional or alumni networks to staff their areas of responsibility.

Example: At a League Tournament, the VC might coordinate general outreach, while the Judge Advisor recruits a panel of five judges from local alumni and teachers. The ED supplements by pulling in parents for hospitality, while the PDP contributes a trained FTA.

This shared responsibility not only spreads the workload but also builds resilience. When each leader recruits within their sphere, the volunteer pool becomes broader, more diverse, and better connected to the event's needs. The table below shows how each role contributes to the recruitment process, with an example of how these pieces come together in practice.

Table 37: Common Ways to Share Recruitment Responsibility

Role	Recruitment Contribution
Volunteer Coordinator (VC)	Manages outreach, tracks assignments in VMS, identifies gaps.
Event Director (ED)	Leverages personal/professional networks, supports messaging, ensures overall coverage.

Role	Recruitment Contribution
Program Delivery Partner (PDP)	Provides access to regional volunteer pools, fills specialized roles, sets standards.
Key Volunteers	Recruit within their domain (e.g., Judge Advisor recruits judges, Head Referee recruits referees).

Step 1: Define What You Need

Every recruitment plan begins with clarity. The size and level of your event determine how many volunteers you will need and how early you must begin. A scrimmage with eight teams may be possible with a dozen people wearing multiple hats. A 36-team qualifier or a regional championship, however, requires several specialized volunteers and weeks/months of lead time.

When recruiting for major roles such as Judge Advisor, Head Referee, or FTA, remember that these individuals often contribute far beyond their day-of duties. At larger or advancing events, many of them should also be part of the planning committee described in the [Planning Committees](#) section. Their early involvement shapes schedules and training plans, carries knowledge from one season to the next, and distributes responsibility across the leadership team. Not every event requires every Key Volunteer at the table, but including them at the planning stage strengthens both preparation and delivery.

Defining what you need in terms of volunteers for an event has four critical steps:

Table 38: Steps for Defining Volunteer Need

Step	What to Do	Why It Matters
1. Identify the event scope	Confirm the number of teams, event type, and advancement level (see <i>Event Scope</i> section).	Scope drives everything about volunteer planning—how many roles you need, how much training is required, and how far in advance recruitment must start.
2. Understand the roles	Review official <i>Volunteer Role Descriptions</i> for common positions and their responsibilities.	Ensures you know not just how many volunteers you need, but the mix of skills and certifications required.
3. Determine the numbers	Use the <i>Volunteer Management System (VMS)</i> to see minimum recommended volunteer counts. Then consider extras like additional judges, inspectors, referees, or a setup/breakdown crew.	VMS provides the floor, not the ceiling. Critical thinking prevents gaps and bottlenecks.

Step	What to Do	Why It Matters
4. Set priorities early	Recruit Key Volunteers and planning committee members first (Judge Advisor, Head Referee, FTA, Lead Scorekeeper, Pit Admin Supervisor).	These roles require training and provide leadership for recruitment and event operations.

Once you’ve worked through these steps, the next question is scale: how do these principles translate to different types of events? The Volunteer Management System (VMS) offers a set of minimum targets for each event level, but those numbers alone won’t capture everything. They are a baseline – a useful starting point – but every event needs to account for local context, additional roles, and the reality that larger tournaments require broader leadership and deeper volunteer benches. The table below shows how recruitment expectations grow as events scale, and where organizers should think beyond the minimums.

Table 39: Volunteer Recruitment by Event Level

Event Level	Scope & Roles	Numbers & Resources	Recruitment Priorities
Level 0 – Scrimmages & Off-Season Events	Informal events, often used for practice or training. Limited roles beyond basic field and pit functions.	VMS role targets are minimal. Typically 10–18 volunteers, many wearing multiple hats. Judges not required. Setup/teardown is optional but recommended.	Focus on securing an Event Director, a small referee crew, a head referee, a scorekeeper, and an FTA. Recruit general helpers for load-in/out.
Level 1 – League Meets (LM)	Short, inspection- & match-only events (no judging). Requires core field and scoring staff.	VMS role target shows ~23 volunteers. Includes Head Referee, FTA, Scorekeeper, Pit Admin Supervisor, and inspectors. Judges are excluded.	Recruit Key Volunteers early. Fill field reset and queuing roles from local team parents or students.
Level 1 – League Tournaments (LT), Qualifying Tournaments (QT) and Super Qualifying Tournaments (SQTs)	Full tournament experience: inspections, judging, matches, awards.	VMS role target rises significantly (~37–50). Requires Judge Advisor, full judge panel, referees, inspectors, and a larger field/queuing crew.	Start with Key Volunteers (JA, HR, FTA, LS, Pit Admin Supervisor). Recruit judges and inspectors next, then fill out queuing, reset, and support roles.
Level 2 – Regional Championships (RCMP)	Large, advancing tournaments with potentially multiple divisions, full judging, and expanded logistics.	VMS role target rise significantly: ~40-90+ volunteers depending on size. Includes multiple judging panels, referees, inspectors, AV, hospitality, and safety staff.	Recruit Key Volunteers months in advance. Build layered sub-teams (e.g., multiple queuing leads, pit admins). Confirm a dedicated setup/breakdown crew.

Event Level	Scope & Roles	Numbers & Resources	Recruitment Priorities
Level 3 – Premier Events & FIRST Championship	Capstone events with international visibility. Full production standards, broadcast-level polish, and layered leadership teams.	Hundreds of volunteers across divisions, often managed by professional staff and large planning committees.	Recruitment begins a year in advance. Requires a deep bench of certified Key Volunteers, sub-team leaders, and specialized support (AV, production, guest services).

VMS role targets are designed to show the minimum staffing recommendation for an event. They’re a useful starting point—but not the full picture. Planning committees should always define staffing based on the *reality of their event’s scope*, not just the default minimums.

- Large team counts may require more judges than the baseline target.
- Events that are spread out over a larger venue may require more volunteer support in queuers, pit runners, pit admin, etc.
- Setup and breakdown crews (load-in/load-out) are often not flagged as required in VMS, but recruiting them in advance will make the event run far smoother.

These minimums exist to reduce the recruitment burden, since finding volunteers is one of the most challenging parts of planning. Still, thoughtful organizers will look beyond the checklist to ensure their event is properly staffed.

The graphic below shows the role target view for a League Meet in VMS. It lists only the required minimum staff and excludes judging roles, since League Meets do not include judging. VMS will dynamically adjust minimum role requirements depending on the event type.

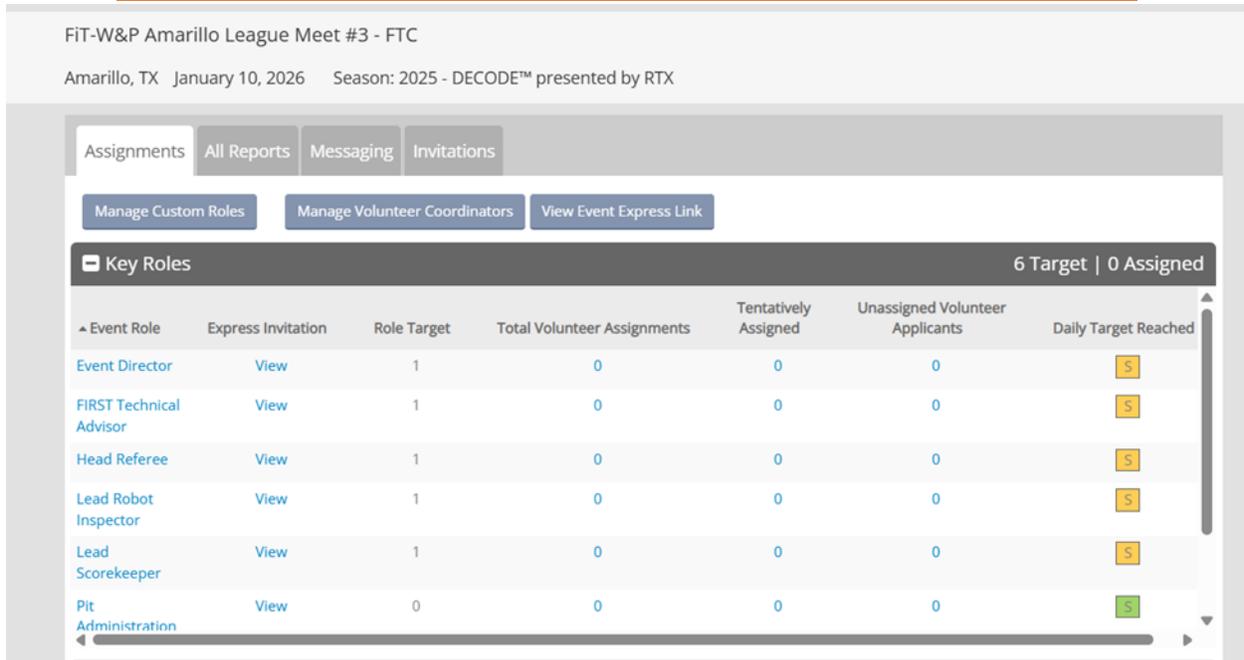


Figure 1: Example Role Target View in VMS

Step 2: Create the Recruitment Timeline

Once you know how many volunteers you’ll need and which roles are the highest priority, the next step is to map out a timeline for recruitment. Recruitment is not a one-time task—it is a phased process that begins months in advance and builds momentum as the event approaches.

The goal is to start early with leadership roles, then layer in specialty positions, and finally round out the event with general helpers. This ensures training needs are met and prevents last-minute scrambles.

Table 40: Recruitment Timeline by Event Level

Event Level	When to Begin	Recruitment Focus Over Time
Level 0 – Scrimmages & Off-Season	2–4 weeks out	Keep it light. Confirm a handful of key roles (ED, referee, scorekeeper) and invite new volunteers to shadow.
Level 1 – League Meets, League Tournaments, Qualifiers	6–10 weeks out	Start with Key Volunteers (Head Referee, Judge Advisor if judging applies, FTA, Scorekeeper). Then layer in judges, referees, and inspectors. Fill queuing and reset crews closer to the event, often from local parents or students.
Level 2 – Regional Championships	4–6 months out	Begin with Key Volunteers and sub-team leads months ahead. Over the season, recruit full judging panels, multiple referee crews, inspectors, hospitality, AV, and safety staff. Final wave is general helpers and load-in/load-out.
Level 3 – Premier Events & FIRST Championship	9–12 months out	Recruitment is staged across the entire year. Confirm high-level Key Volunteers early, then run phased campaigns to build out hundreds of slots, often in partnership with regional staff and HQ.

Key principle: Think of recruitment as a series of waves. Secure leadership first, then specialists, then the broad base of general helpers. Starting too late—or trying to recruit everyone at once—creates stress for both organizers and volunteers.

Step 3: Start with Known Networks

Before you look outward, begin recruitment with the people and networks closest to your event. These groups already have a stake in the program and are often the most reliable sources of early commitments.

- **Program Delivery Partners (PDPs):** PDPs often maintain regional volunteer lists, alumni contacts, and sponsor connections. Start here to see what existing pools are available.
- **Planning Committee & Key Volunteers:** These leaders not only fill their own roles but can also recruit within their circles. A Judge Advisor may bring past judges; an FTA may invite technical peers.
- **Returning Volunteers:** People who have worked past events are the easiest to re-engage. Reach out early with a personal “we’d love to have you back” invitation.

Starting with these networks secures the backbone of your event and gives you a foundation to build on. Once those commitments are in place, you can broaden outreach with confidence.

Step 4: Expand to Wider Audiences

Once your core networks are secured, the next step is to broaden your search. Different audiences bring different strengths, and the most effective events draw from multiple sources rather than relying too heavily on a single group. The goal is balance: alumni bring experience, sponsors bring visibility, parents bring commitment, and civic groups bring fresh energy.

Think about your recruitment like building a robot: no single component makes it work. You need the drivetrain, the sensors, the structure, and the power system working together. Volunteer recruitment works the same way—every audience contributes a unique piece to the whole.

- **FIRST Alumni** know the program’s culture and rules. They often step easily into certified roles such as judges or referees, and many are eager to “pay it forward.”
- **Corporate Volunteers and Sponsors** often come in groups, motivated by service hours and community impact. They are excellent for roles like field reset or hospitality, where teamwork and energy matter more than technical expertise.
- **Team-Affiliated Adults (parents, teachers, mentors)** are deeply invested in the student experience. They’re great in roles that keep the event running smoothly (hospitality, pit admin, setup/teardown). Be mindful of conflicts of interest when assigning them.
- **Colleges and Professional Organizations** supply technically curious volunteers who want hands-on STEM exposure. Engineering societies and student clubs can become pipelines for judges, inspectors, and reset crews.
- **Civic and Youth Groups** bring energy, service, and visibility. Rotary clubs, Scouts, 4-H, and similar groups are often looking for meaningful projects where their members can contribute as runners, concessions staff, or reset crews.

Pulling these audiences together creates a **diverse volunteer team**. Experienced voices anchor the event, service-driven groups keep energy high, and team-affiliated adults ensure the tournament reflects the community it serves.

Table 41: Types of Volunteer Audience

Audience	Why They Volunteer	Best Roles	Recruitment Approach
FIRST Alumni	Passionate about the program; understand culture and rules.	Judges, referees, inspectors.	Alumni groups, word of mouth, social media.
Corporate / Sponsors	Interested in service hours and community visibility.	Judges, hospitality, guest speakers	Work through HR departments or sponsor contacts.
Team-Affiliated (Students, Parents, Teachers, Mentors)	Invested in student experience and team success.	Hospitality, queueing, field reset, pit admin, setup/teardown.	Direct asks. Manage conflicts of interest (e.g., parents not judging their own teams).
Colleges & Professional Orgs	Service learning, technical interest, networking.	Judges, inspectors, field reset.	Faculty contacts, student clubs (SWE, NSBE, ASME, IEEE).
Civic / Youth Groups	Community service missions and leadership development.	field reset, concessions, runners.	Rotary, Scouts, 4-H, local civic organizations.

Researching and understanding the different audiences can be daunting, below is a basic recommendation of professional organizations that may provide partnership opportunities in your region.

Table 42: Professional Organizations for Volunteer Resources

Professional Organizations
Local or regional chapters of professional and technical organizations.
The American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME).
Society of Women Engineers (SWE).
National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE).
Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SPHE).
Entrepreneurial Associations and Economic Development Groups.
Information Technology Associations.
Area computing groups.
K-12 education associations.
School Districts.
Parent-Teacher Organizations.
Senior Centers and Senior Citizen Organizations.
Military organizations, recruiters, college ROTC instructors
Civic and Service Organizations – Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions, Elks, Chambers of Commerce, etc.
Youth Service Organizations – Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H, Boys and Girls Club.
Colleges and Universities – both faculty and students.

Step 5: Use Effective Recruitment Channels

Knowing who to recruit is only half the battle—you also need to reach them. The most successful recruitment blends **broad outreach** with **personal invitations**. Generic “we need volunteers” posts rarely fill critical roles, but when paired with direct asks and targeted channels, they can widen your pool and bring in new people.

Table 43: Recruitment Channels

Channel	Best Use	Tips for Success
Direct Outreach	Re-engaging past volunteers, coaches, mentors, and colleagues.	Call or email personally. Be specific about the role and why you’re asking them.
Social Media	Engaging alumni, student clubs, and the broader community.	Keep posts short and specific. Always include a sign-up link. Highlight benefits (“training provided,” “one-day role”).
Corporate Portals	Tapping into sponsor employee bases and service-hour programs.	Share event details through HR or volunteer platforms. Emphasize team/group opportunities.
Shadowing Opportunities	Introducing new volunteers at low-stakes events (scrimmages, league meets).	Invite potential recruits to observe or try small roles first, then step up at larger tournaments.
Email Lists & Newsletters	Leveraging existing regional/team communication networks.	Ask your PDP to include a volunteer call-out. Provide a short blurb with a clear link to sign up.
Onsite Promotion at Events	Recruiting parents, mentors, and guests already attending events.	Display a volunteer interest QR code at Pit Admin or mention it during ceremonies. Capture names while enthusiasm is high.

Personal invitations almost always beat broad announcements. A Judge Advisor inviting a former mentor to judge again, or an Event Director reaching out directly to a trusted parent, will fill a role faster than any mass email. Use broad channels to cast the net, but rely on personal asks to close the gap.

Step 6: Build for the Future

Recruitment should not reset to zero every season. Strong planning committees think beyond the immediate event and focus on growing a sustainable volunteer base. This means investing in relationships, creating pathways for new people, and ensuring volunteers feel valued enough to return.

The goal of this section is to encourage long-term thinking, not to overwhelm. If you are a first-time Event Director or Planning Committee, focus on running a successful event this year. Building for the future is valuable, but it’s a recommendation—not a requirement.

Table 44: Principles for Long-Term Growth

Practice	Why It Matters	Example in Action
Pair new volunteers with experienced ones	Builds confidence and ensures knowledge transfer.	A rookie referee shadows the Head Referee for half a day before taking calls themselves.
Thank people early and often	Recognition creates commitment before the event even begins.	A quick “we’re glad you’re joining us” email to new volunteers the week they sign up.
Connect contributions to impact	Volunteers return when they see their efforts directly helping students.	Share photos of judges with teams or tell reset crews how their speed kept matches on time.
Capture and track new contacts	Prevents losing first-time helpers and builds next year’s pool.	Keep a spreadsheet of shadow volunteers and pass it to the PDP or VC for follow-up.

Planning Committees that run events year after year are uniquely positioned to grow leadership and continuity. A healthy committee doesn’t just deliver this year’s event—it actively grooms successors and expands the circle of ownership.

Table 45: The Role of Planning Committees in Building Volunteer Sustainability

Committee Focus	How It Builds the Future	Example
Develop successors	Ensures continuity when current leaders step back.	Judge Advisor identifies a veteran judge as a likely replacement.
Elevate returning volunteers	Moves people from “helper” to “leader.”	A queuer volunteer is invited to train as Pit Admin the following year.
Distribute responsibilities	Prevents burnout and keeps the role manageable.	Event Director delegates hospitality and AV to committee leads instead of holding everything.
Expand ownership	Creates a culture of shared responsibility and broader recruitment.	Each Key Volunteer is asked to recruit one new person for their area.

Think like a team builder, not just an event host. Each season is an opportunity to add new names, deepen commitments, and hand off leadership in ways that keep the event sustainable for the long term. Recruitment isn’t just about filling roles today—it’s about ensuring that your tournament can thrive year after year.

Volunteer Assignment & Confirmation

Recruiting volunteers is only the first step. Before anyone can serve at an event, they must be properly registered, screened, and trained. Once those steps are complete, the Volunteer Coordinator (VC) can assign volunteers to roles in the Volunteer Management System (VMS) and confirm their participation. The Event Director (ED) and Program Delivery Partner (PDP) provide oversight, ensuring that all compliance requirements are met and that critical roles are covered.

Table 46: Core Responsibilities in Volunteer Assignment & Confirmation

Task	What It Means	Who Leads	Who Supports
Verify Youth Protection (YPP) completion	Check that all volunteers over 18 have cleared the required FIRST background check in the Volunteer Management System (VMS).	VC	PDP ensures compliance; ED confirms nothing is missed.
Confirm role training/certification	Some roles (Judge Advisor, Head Referee, FTA, etc.) require online training and certification in the FIRST Learning Management System (LMS). The VC verifies this in VMS.	VC	Key Volunteers (JA, HR, FTA) flag gaps; ED helps adjust staffing if needed.
Assign volunteers to roles in VMS	Place each volunteer into their official event role in VMS. This step makes the roster official and sends automated confirmations.	VC	ED + Key Volunteers may provide input on best placement.
Review staffing plan	Look at the full roster: Are all key roles covered? Are backups identified for critical jobs?	VC drafts roster	ED reviews and signs off; PDP checks regional requirements.
Confirm final roster and notify volunteers	Volunteers receive both the automated VMS email and a short personal message with arrival times, dress code, and role expectations.	VC	ED ensures all critical roles know who to report to.

Volunteer Registration and Compliance

Every volunteer begins in the **FIRST Volunteer Registration System (VR)**. This is where they create an account, select an event, and indicate preferred roles. Their application then flows into the **Volunteer Management System (VMS)**, which the VC uses to verify readiness and make official assignments.

This section focuses on pre-event assignments. There may be cases in which Walk-On Volunteers are needed, in which case those volunteers may not complete the compliance requirements for an event. Please review the Walk On Volunteer Policy for details on how to handle walk-on volunteers.

Within this process, two checkpoints matter most:

Table 47: Volunteer Compliance Checkpoints

Requirement	How It Works	What to Watch For	Who Ensures It
Youth Protection Screening (YPP)	Volunteers over 18 complete a background check when registering. Status is visible in VMS. Outside US/Canada, volunteers acknowledge the YPP policy instead.	All over-18 volunteers must show as “cleared” in VMS 1–2 weeks before the event. Those not cleared may only serve as walk-ons in limited roles with PDP approval.	VC verifies; ED confirms with VC; PDP oversees compliance.
Training & Certification	Many roles require online training or certification through the FIRST Learning Management System (LMS). VMS records whether training is complete.	Requirements change annually – always check VMS, not static charts. Best practice: training completed at least two weeks before the event so gaps can be filled.	VC monitors; Key Volunteers (JA, HR, FTA, etc.) confirm for their teams; ED reviews final roster.

Volunteer Coordinators or other Planning Committee members that have Volunteer Coordinator privileges in VMS can view YPP screening and Training Certification by selecting the volunteers in VMS and going to the Volunteer Personal Information page. The image below shows a view of how to find this on the Volunteer Personal Information Page, for more detailed guidance on how to use VMS please refer to the Volunteer Management System Guide.

Personal Information

<p>Contact Information:</p> <p>Legal First Name: Emily</p> <p>Phone:</p> <p>Email:</p> <p>Address:</p>	<p>Demographics:</p> <p>Age:</p> <p>Service:</p> <p>Gender:</p> <p>Shirt:</p> <p>Pronouns:</p> <p>Languages Spoken:</p> <p>English</p>	<p><i>FIRST</i> Youth Protection Policy: ✔</p> <p><i>FIRST</i> Overall California YPP Clearance Status: ✔</p> <p><i>FIRST</i> Overall Pennsylvania YPP Clearance Status: ✔</p> <p>Consent & Release: ✔</p> <p>Certifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ 1/6/2025 - 24-25 FTC Judge ✔ 10/18/2024 - 24-25 FTC Volunteer Coordinator ✔ 10/16/2024 - 24-25 FTC Queuer ✔ 10/15/2024 - 24-25 FTC WiFi Technical Advisor ✔ 10/11/2024 - 24-25 FTC Field Inspector ✔ 10/10/2024 - 24-25 FTC Gracious Professionalism ✔ 10/10/2024 - FIRST Data Privacy and Protection Training 2024-2025 ✔ 10/10/2024 - 24-25 FTC Pit Administrator
<p>Self-Reported Accommodations:</p>	<p>Dietary Restrictions:</p>	
<p>Emergency Contact:</p> <p>Contact Name:</p> <p>Phone Number:</p>	<p>Alumni:</p> <p>Yes</p>	
<p>Team Affiliation:</p> <p> </p> <p> </p>	<p>Skills/Expertise in:</p>	
<p>Affiliations:</p> <p>No Affiliation</p>		
<p>Employer:</p> <p>-</p>	<p>Share With Employer:</p> <p>no</p>	

Figure 2: YPP and Training View in VMS

Matching Volunteers to Roles

Once volunteers are registered, screened, and trained, the next step is assigning them to the right positions. This is about more than filling open slots – it’s about building a team that can deliver a smooth, fair, and welcoming tournament.

Good assignments balance **what the event needs** with **what volunteers bring to the table**. The VC leads this process, but the ED and Key Volunteers play an important role in reviewing the plan, identifying gaps, and confirming that critical positions have coverage. A thoughtful assignment process increases volunteer satisfaction, prevents burnout, and creates continuity for future events.

Several factors shape how volunteers are matched to roles:

Table 48: Factors for Matching Volunteers to Roles

Factor	What It Means	Why It Matters
Preferences	Volunteers select and rank roles when registering.	Matching roles to preferences builds enthusiasm and improves retention for future events.
Experience & Skills	VMS history shows past roles and completed training.	Experienced volunteers can anchor departments; newer volunteers can be placed where they’ll learn and grow.

Factor	What It Means	Why It Matters
Conflicts of Interest	Parents/mentors/alumni/siblings/friends of competing teams should not serve as judges or in key roles like Head Referees and JAs. There may be some exceptions but in general Volunteer Coordinators should be aware of COIs and their impact on events.	Protects fairness and trust in awards and match outcomes. Have all event volunteers with a COI fill out the FIRST Volunteer Conflict of Interest and Disclosure Statement .
Availability	Some volunteers cannot commit to a full day.	Flexible roles (reset, check-in, hospitality) allow partial participation without undermining core operations.
Key Volunteer Input	Judge Advisors, Head Referees, FTAs, and others know the strengths of their sub-teams.	Their insight helps refine placements and ensures specialized areas are covered.

Reviewing the Staffing Plan & Assigning in VMS

After the staffing plan has been reviewed, the Volunteer Coordinator (VC) finalizes assignments in the **Volunteer Management System (VMS)**. Until this step is completed, volunteers remain “unassigned” – even if a plan exists on paper. Assignment in VMS ensures compliance checks are tied to each role, generates the official roster *FIRST* uses for reporting, and triggers confirmation emails to volunteers.

The VC selects a role, moves the appropriate volunteers into the role schedule, and saves the assignment. Using the “**Save Assignment and Notify**” function both updates the roster and emails each volunteer their assignment details.

This section covers the birds eye view of how assignments work in VMS. Please refer to the [VMS User Guide](#) for more details on how VMS works.

Table 49: How Volunteer Assignments Work (birds-eye view)

Step in VMS	Why It Matters	Who’s Involved
Add volunteer to the role schedule	Moves the person from “interested” to “assigned.”	VC executes; planning committee reviews draft plan.
Save assignment	Locks the roster in the system.	VC executes; committee ensures critical coverage before this step.
Notify volunteer	Sends automated confirmation email with role details.	VC executes; committee may reinforce with personal communication.

Making assignments is not just a technical step – it is the point where the staffing plan becomes real. The committee should approach it with the same care as the review itself.

Table 50: Things to Keep in Mind When Assigning

Consideration	What It Means	Why It Matters
Understand the flow	Registration happens in the Volunteer Registration System; assignment happens in VMS.	Assignment in VMS is the official step that moves someone from “applicant” to “event staff.”
Confirm before finalizing	Consult the committee before clicking “Save Assignment and Notify.”	Ensures all key roles are covered, conflicts of interest are resolved, and backups are in place.
System vs. personal confirmation	VMS emails confirm the role, but volunteers still need practical details.	A short personal note (arrival time, check-in, dress code) included in the “Save Assignment and Notify” message reduces confusion and builds confidence ahead of further communications
Shared oversight	The VC executes the technical steps, but the committee provides checks and balances.	Keeps assignments aligned with event needs, readiness, and regional policies.

The “Save Assignment and Notify” step in VMS triggers the initial assignment email to volunteers. This is only the starting point. Best practice is to supplement that with additional, tailored messages that provide logistics and expectations. The specifics of what to send and when are covered in the next section on Volunteer Communication.

Volunteer Communication

Clear, timely communication is what makes volunteers feel prepared and valued. While the Volunteer Coordinator (VC) often leads this work, the Event Director (ED), Program Delivery Partner (PDP), and other Key Volunteers all share responsibility for ensuring volunteers know what to expect and where to turn with questions.

Volunteer communication happens in two main ways:

1. Sharing Key Event Information
2. Handling Questions and Issues

Sharing Key Event Information

Proactive communication is what prepares volunteers to show up on time, ready, and confident. This is more than just emailing out a schedule – it’s about making sure each volunteer receives the right information, at the right time, in a format that works for your region.

When a volunteer is assigned in The Volunteer Management System (VMS), the details entered there matter. Arrival and end times should reflect the actual expectations of the role. That way, even the automated assignment confirmation sets realistic expectations. This first message is often a

volunteer’s initial glimpse of your event, so it helps if it also offers some high-level context about what kind of event it is and where their role fits.

This section prescribes two main stages of communication with volunteers: an initial confirmation through VMS (with realistic times and brief context) and a more detailed event information packet about a week before the event.

Some regions deliver volunteer information in formal packets, while others use a lighter, more distributed approach between the VC and Key Volunteers. The format may vary, but the principle is the same – every volunteer should receive clear, complete, and timely information before the event.

Table 51: Key Event Information to Share with Volunteers

Stage	Information	Why It Matters	When to Send
Initial Confirmation (via VMS)	Role assignment & realistic times	Provides certainty about their commitment; sets first expectations; avoids mismatched arrival	At assignment
	High-level event context (where, date, next steps)	Reassures volunteers about the basics and signals that detailed information will follow	At assignment
Event Information Packet (about 1 week before)	Reporting times & expected hours	Reinforces accurate expectations and planning	1 week before
	Event schedule overview	Shows the flow of the day; helps volunteers anticipate pace	1 week before
	Role expectations & resources	Ensures readiness (training links, dress code, special requirements)	1 week before
	Venue map & parking	Reduces day-of stress and confusion	1 week before
	Check-in requirements & meals	Clarifies logistics and hospitality (badge pick-up, food availability)	1 week before

Handling Questions and Issues

Even with clear instructions, volunteers will have questions – about sign-up, screening, training, or logistics. How those questions are answered is just as important as the information itself.

This ties directly to the principles outlined in [Setting the Tone with Communication](#): hospitality begins with communication. A quick, thoughtful, and consistent response doesn’t just solve a problem – it reassures a volunteer that they matter, that their time is valued, and that they are part of a community that wants them to succeed.

Communication is cumulative: if an early answer is unclear, later corrections won't fully repair the stress it caused. That's why it is critical to answer questions consistently and to always use official resources or planning documents, rather than improvising from memory.

The table below outlines the most common categories of volunteer questions and how to answer them:

Table 52: Common Volunteer Questions

Question Type	Common Questions	How to Answer	Reference / Source
Sign-Up & Assignment	"How do I sign up?"	Direct volunteers to the official registration instructions. If they need a role change, confirm in VMS and send an updated assignment.	Volunteer Registration User Guide
	"Can I change my assignment?"		Check current assignment and discuss with relevant planning committee members regarding reassignment
Screening & Eligibility	"How do I complete Youth Protection?"	Explain that Youth Protection must be complete before the event. Show them how to check status in VMS. If incomplete, remind them they may be limited to walk-on roles.	Volunteer Screening Guide
	"Why am I still pending?"		Check eligibility blockers in VMS
Training Requirements	"What training do I need for this role?"	Point to the Volunteer Resource Page and the relevant role-specific manual or role-specific LMS modules. Encourage early completion for Key Volunteer roles.	Volunteer Role Descriptions Volunteer Resource Page
			Role-Specific Manuals/LMS
Event Logistics	"What time do I arrive?"	Confirm against planning documents (schedule, maps) or check with the planning crew. If available, reference any distributed packet or communication.	Planning Crew
	"Where do I park or check in?"		Event Documents/Packets (if used)
Other Concerns	Anything outside these categories	The VC should answer directly when possible, or escalate to ED/PDP if policy or exceptions are involved.	Depends on issue

Creating an Event Culture through Hospitality

A FIRST Tech Challenge tournament is not just a competition – it's an experience. People may come for the matches, but what they remember most is how they were treated: Were they fed? Were their

needs anticipated? Did they feel like they belonged? Good hospitality makes participants feel cared for. Intentional culture-building makes them feel part of something worth returning to.

Hospitality and culture should be approached like a ladder: start with the essentials, then add enhancements, and finally weave in culture-building practices that express the spirit of *FIRST*.

The Basics: Non-Negotiable Hospitality

Every tournament starts with the same question: “*Will people feel cared for?*” These are the essentials that every event, no matter how small, must deliver. Think of them as your **hospitality floor** – the customer service minimums that prevent stress and keep participants focused on the experience.

Imagine a volunteer working a six-hour shift without a meal, or a student team discovering at 1:00 pm that no food is available onsite. These small failures can overshadow even the most well-run event. By covering the basics, you build the trust that makes everything else possible.

Table 53: Non-Negotiable Hospitality

Area	Expectation	Why It Matters	Common Pitfalls
Volunteer Meals & Beverages	At least one meal for short events; breakfast + lunch for full-day tournaments. Water, coffee/tea, and simple snacks available all day.	Volunteers are the backbone of the event. Fed volunteers stay energized and engaged.	Relying on volunteers to bring their own meals → leads to burnout or attrition.
Team Food Options	Clear plan: on-site concessions, pre-orders, or nearby restaurants. Communicate early.	Hungry teams = stressed students and mentors. Knowing options prevents frustration.	Forgetting to share details in advance; concessions running out of food.
Pit Essentials	Enough pit space with power, seating, and restrooms close by.	Gives teams a safe and functional basecamp for the day.	Overcrowded pits; long walks to restrooms; tangled power drops.
Quiet Rooms or Break Spaces	A quiet room where anyone can step away.	Supports students, mentors, and volunteers who need downtime. Models inclusion.	Forgetting signage → no one knows it exists; using a noisy classroom as a “quiet space.”

These aren’t nice-to-haves – they are what make an FTC event feel respectful and functional. When participants can count on food, water, safe spaces, and clear information, they are free to focus on what really matters: building, competing, and celebrating together.

Covering the basics doesn’t require perfection, but it does require intentionality. The essentials must be visible, dependable, and consistent across events. Only once these needs are secured can organizers layer on enhancements and culture-building practices that make an event truly special.

Enhancements: Making People Feel Valued

Once the essentials are covered, the next step is asking: “How can we make this event not just functional, but welcoming?” Enhancements don’t need to be expensive or complicated – they’re small touches that signal respect, care, and community.

Think of enhancements as the hospitality ceiling you can reach toward. They aren’t required for an event to run, but they transform how participants remember the experience.

Table 54: Hospitality Enhancements

Area	Examples	Why It Matters
Volunteer Comfort & Identity	Event shirts or pins, swag bags (snacks + thank-you note), raffles or recognition boards, comfy lounge space with signage.	Volunteers feel recognized and part of the event’s identity.
Team Treats & Giveaways	Candy bowls at Pit Admin, buttons/stickers/bracelets, photo booth or backdrop, raffle drawings for spirit prizes.	Adds fun and energy for students. Creates memorable little moments.
Equity-Minded Touches	Free menstrual products in restrooms, visual aids (large-font maps/schedules), quiet/wellness spaces, hydration stations in pits/competition areas, accessible seating near fields and in pits.	Small signals of care that make the event more inclusive and welcoming.
Concessions & Comfort Touches	Coffee/hospitality station for adults, affordable concessions with student-friendly pricing, morning snack options for early arrivals.	Parents and mentors feel supported, reducing stress and fatigue

Enhancements are where events begin to feel personal. A volunteer who walks into a lounge with their name on a recognition board feels seen. A parent who finds coffee available in the morning feels respected. A student who can refill their water bottle without leaving the pit feels cared for.

When events provide these touches, participants don’t just *attend* – they feel like they *belong*. That sense of belonging is what keeps people coming back, year after year.

Culture-Building: Elevating the Experience

Hospitality keeps people comfortable. Enhancements make them feel valued. But culture is what transforms a tournament into a celebration of community – the thing participants will talk about long after the trophies are awarded.

Culture doesn’t mean adding big, expensive extras. It means creating small, intentional moments that express the spirit of *FIRST*: teamwork, discovery, inclusion, and fun. These touches make the event more than just a competition – they make it a gathering people *want* to return to.

Table 55: Culture-Building Practices

Area	Examples	Why It Matters
Celebration & Fun	Dance breaks, photo booth or team spirit wall, themed music, after-event socials (pizza, ice cream).	Reinforces that <i>FIRST</i> Tech Challenge is about joy and community, not just competition.
Community Connection	STEM expos, sponsor/demo booths, alumni tables, local colleges or industry partners showcasing projects.	Connects teams to the broader STEM ecosystem and highlights future pathways.
Recognition & Storytelling	Volunteer shout-outs during ceremonies, team spotlight features, spirit or mentor awards, mentor/coach/ alumni parade, digital slideshows with team photos.	Makes individuals and teams feel seen beyond scores and rankings.
Ceremonial Moments	Opening/closing ceremonies planned with intentionality, national anthem or cultural performances, sponsor recognitions woven into the show.	Adds weight and significance to the event, anchoring it in community pride.

Culture-building is how *FIRST* Tech Challenge events show their heart. A strong match schedule proves the event is well-run; culture shows why it’s worth remembering.

- Students leave feeling celebrated, not just scored.
- Volunteers leave knowing they contributed to something bigger.
- Families leave seeing the value of the program in action.

Even one or two cultural touches can transform the mood of a tournament. When layered onto strong hospitality, they create the **signature feel** that keeps teams, volunteers, and partners coming back season after season.

Pre-Event Operations

Pre-Event Operations bridges the gap between early planning and event day delivery. Once scope, budget, and committee are set, the focus turns to the operational systems that make a tournament work in practice. These systems are the framework that participants encounter on event day: the technology that powers matches, the flow of the arena and pits, the structure of judging, and the way ceremonies and production create a sense of occasion.

Strong operations aren’t just logistics – they set the tone for the event. Reliable systems and smooth processes build confidence among teams, volunteers, and guests, creating an environment where the focus can stay on the student experience.

This section provides practical guidance in each of the following areas:

Table 56: Pre-Event Operations Section Map

Area	What It Covers	Why It Matters
Technical Operations	AV, IT, networking, and streaming	Ensures the event has reliable sound, visuals, and connectivity.
Event Management System	FTC Scoring and FTC-Live setup and management	Produces the official record of rankings, awards, and advancement.
Field Operations	Setup, testing, and coordination of the competition fields	Keeps matches running safely and consistently.
Judging Operations	Recruitment, training, and scheduling of judges; interview logistics	Delivers a fair, inspiring recognition process that highlights student achievement.
Pit Operations	Pit Admin, incident intake, lost & found, team support	Creates a central hub for communication, safety, and participant support.
Incident & Emergency Management	Alignment with venue safety plans and reporting protocols	Protects participants and ensures clear response paths.
Show and Production Operations	Ceremonies, run of show, guest/media management	Shapes the narrative of the event and celebrates students.

Technical Operations

Technical operations form the backbone of every *FIRST* Tech Challenge event. Field electronics, scoring system, audio/visual, and internet all need to function reliably for the event to succeed. While much of the technical detail is covered in role-specific manuals (*FIRST* Technical Advisor, Scorekeeper, etc.), Event Directors and planning committees should still ensure that a technical plan is developed well in advance of event day.

Creating a Technical Plan

A technical plan outlines the major technology needs of the tournament and identifies who is responsible for each. At a minimum, the plan should:

- Define power requirements for pits, fields, judging rooms, registration, and administration spaces.
- Identify AV needs, including microphones, speakers, projection or displays, and how ceremonies will be supported.
- Document IT and networking requirements, including robot control Wi-Fi environment, scoring network, and any streaming platforms in use.
- List equipment sources (what the host provides vs. what comes from the PDP)

- Assign a technical point of contact (FTA or equivalent) for both planning and day-of troubleshooting.

The plan should be reviewed alongside venue contracts and site visits so that load-in, electrical drops, and internet access are all confirmed before event week.

Equipment Planning & Confirmation

Technical success often comes down to whether the right equipment is available, tested, and working. A good practice is to create an equipment inventory checklist and confirm all items at least two weeks before the event. This includes:

- Field electronics and scoring system computers (see Scorekeeper Manual).
- Displays, projectors, or monitors for audience and match timers.
- Audio systems (DJ/Emcee microphone, field announcements).
- Printers for scoring and judging needs.
- Extension cords, power strips, and gaffer's tape for safety.
- Backup cables and spare laptops where possible.

Many regions manage shared equipment pools. Hosts should confirm delivery and return procedures early in the planning process.

IT and Streaming Support

Reliable IT and streaming is often the most nuanced part of technical operations. Consult the [Wi-Fi Event Planning Guide](#) and [Venue Networking Requirements Guide](#) for details. An overview of key considerations include:

- Robot Control Network Details: If there are more than 40 teams, use assigned Wi-Fi channels.
- Scoring Network: The scoring system should run on a standalone network. If using Wi-Fi, ensure channels do not overlap with team control networks.
- Coordination with Other *FIRST* Programs: If an FTC event is sharing space with an FRC event, both must coordinate channel allocation to avoid interference.
- Streaming: If streaming matches or ceremonies, identify the platform (Twitch, YouTube, etc.), confirm internet bandwidth, and plan for a backup in case of failure.
- On-Site IT Support: Always identify a venue IT contact who can be reached quickly if interference or outages occur.

Reference to Technical Guides and Manuals

This guide is not intended to replace technical role manuals. For detailed instructions on configuring fields, scoring systems, or networks, consult the *FIRST* Tech Challenge [Event Resources](#) page and for technical volunteer role manuals see the [Volunteer Resources](#) page.

Event Management System

Proper set-up and management of the Event Management System ensures that what happens on the field and in the judging rooms becomes the official record of the tournament. Rankings, awards, advancement, and published results all flow through this process. When scoring is handled well, teams trust the results, volunteers stay focused, and the tournament maintains its official standing with *FIRST*.

Roles and Responsibilities

Event Management System administration is a shared responsibility that may look different depending on the size and staffing of the event:

Table 57: Event Management System Roles and Responsibilities

Roles	Responsibility
Program Deliver Partner	Holds regional access in FTC Scoring (the cloud-based system) and may set standards (e.g., match counts, advancement ratios, schedule release timelines) that all events in the region follow. Is responsible for configuring the event setting prior to the event including preparing team lists and sponsors, and transferring data to the local event laptop before the tournament. This responsibility may fall to the Event Director, the Lead Scorekeeper, or a separate volunteer, depending on local practice. Some of these responsibilities may be delegated to the Event Director, FTA or Scorekeeper.
Event Director	Owns the overall delivery of the tournament and ensures that scoring staff are identified and supported.
Lead Scorekeeper	Operates FTC-Live on event day, generates the match schedule after inspections, runs matches, enters results, manages displays, and publishes final data.

See the following FTC Scoring Event Management resources for more information:

- [FTC Scoring Region Management Guide](#) provides the overview of responsibilities of the PDP as Region Administrator
- [FTC Scoring League Set-up Guide](#)
- [FTC-Live Set-Up Guide](#)

Lifecycle of FTC Scoring System Administration

The typical cadence for FTC Scoring to FTC-Live administration for an event follows the lifecycle below. This is fully described in [FTC Scoring Region Management Guide](#):

- **Start of the FTC Season (or 2-3 months ahead of the event)**
 - PDP as FTC Region Administrator or other authorized regional representative submits the FTC event(s) for approval by Headquarters staff.
 - See the [Official Event Request Guide](#)
 - Once approved and after Kickoff, the PDP/Region Administrator configures the Advancement of tournament level events to the region's Championship.
- **Pre-Event (2–3 days out)**
 - PDP or delegate configures the event in FTC Scoring, verifies the team list, adds sponsors, and prepares pit maps ([Pit Map Builder Guide](#)) or announcements if needed.
 - Event Director and PDP confirm regional standards, such as match counts or award expectations. Once this is verified the data transfer can occur.
 - Data is transferred from FTC Scoring to the FTC-Live laptop by the Lead Scorekeeper (method depends on internet availability).

- **Event Day**

- Lead Scorekeeper updates the team list for types of participation after check-in closes.
- Match schedule is generated, once all inspections are complete, and distributed to teams.
- Scores are entered by Referee and verified live then displayed to the audience; rankings are updated.
- Alliance selection and playoffs schedule, bracket, and matches are managed through FTC-Live.
- Awards are entered in coordination with the Judge Advisor and prepared for ceremony presentation. See the [FTC Scoring Judge and Judge Advisor Guide](#) for more information on how to submit awards.
- Event Director or PDP verifies the official results are complete and accurate prior to publishing the event.
- **Post-Event (within 7 days)** Scorekeeper publishes official results and awards from FTC-Live which sync automatically with the official results website [FTC Event Web : Home](#)
- Event Director or PDP verifies the published official results are complete and accurate.

Table 58: Scoring Administration Expectations by Event Level

Level	Scoring Administration Expectations
Level 0 – Scrimmages & Off-Season	Use FTC-Live where possible to practice the workflow; results may not be published. Useful for training new Scorekeepers and Event Admins.
Level 1 – League Meets, LTs, Qualifiers	Full FTC Scoring + FTC-Live workflow. Event Admin role may be combined with the Scorekeeper. Match lists generated only after inspections. Awards entered for LTs/Qualifiers. Results published.
Level 2 – Regional Championships	Larger crews and often multiple fields. Redundancy in displays and printers is expected. Awards must be carefully synced with the Judge Advisor. Publication must be verified quickly.
Level 3 – FIRST Championship & Premier Events	Production-grade execution. Multiple Scorekeepers for redundancy, close coordination with show production, and alignment with broadcast requirements.

Field Operations

Field Operations covers everything that happens on and around the competition field, led by the *FIRST* Technical Advisor (FTA) and Head Referee. These roles work together to ensure matches are played fairly, safely, and without technical disruption. Field Operations also includes the setup, testing, and teardown of fields and game elements, and the coordination of field staff volunteers who support queuing, reset, and field management.

The [Field Operations Guide](#) provides detailed guidance for field staff on arena setup, efficient match play, and other activities that occur in the arena such as sensor calibration. Field Operations will also connect directly into the Event Day Operations section of this guide, where match flow, volunteer coordination, and live issue resolution come together.

Successful Field Operations require a field staff that is appropriate to the size and type of event. The following recommendations will help determine the appropriate level of staffing:

Table 59: Recommended Field Operations Staffing

Level	Role	Recommended for events with...
Level 0 – Scrimmages & Off-Season	FIRST Technical Advisor	Required for all events
	Field Supervisor	More than 24 teams, or More than 3 fields (competition + practice)
	Control System Advisor	More than 16 teams
Level 1 – League Meets, LTs, Qualifiers	FIRST Technical Advisor	Required for all events
	Field Supervisor	More than 24 teams, or More than 3 fields (competition + practice)
	Technical Director	Significant A/V system integration
	Control System Advisor	More than 16 teams • Plus, additional per 16 teams
	Wi-Fi Technical Advisor	More than 40 teams, or A challenging wireless environment
Level 2 – Regional Championships	FIRST Technical Advisor	Required: One <i>Event Lead FTA</i> Recommended: • One <i>Division FTA</i> per division (for multi-division events) • One FTA Assistant per competition field
	Field Supervisor	Recommended for all Regional Championships • One per division
	Technical Director	Recommended for all Regional Championships
	Control System Advisor	Recommended for all Regional Championships • One per 16 teams
	Wi-Fi Technical Advisor	Recommended for all Regional Championships
Level 3 – FIRST Championship & Premier Events	FIRST Technical Advisor	Required: One <i>Event Lead FTA</i> Recommended: • One <i>Division FTA</i> per division (for multi-division events) • One FTA Assistant per competition field
	Field Supervisor	Required for Level 3 events Recommended: One per division
	Technical Director	Required for Level 3 events
	Control System Advisor	Required for Level 3 events Recommended: One per 16 teams
	Wi-Fi Technical Advisor	Required for Level 3 events

Event Directors and Volunteer Coordinators are encouraged to work with the FTA to determine an appropriate level of staffing for each event. In general, we want to avoid overstaffing an event with bored volunteers and understaffing an event with stressed volunteers. Events with a large proportion of rookie teams might prioritize staffing additional CSA volunteers over Field Supervisors or FTA Assistants. Likewise, events with condensed schedules may prioritize staffing Field Supervisors and FTA Assistants to assist with efficient match flow.

Judging Operations

Judging is a structured process that highlights student achievement beyond match play. It recognizes qualities such as creativity, innovation, outreach, documentation, and teamwork through a consistent framework described in **Section 6 (Awards)** of the *Competition Manual*. Every official event requires a trained **Judge Advisor (JA)** and a panel of Judges to facilitate this process.

The Judge Advisor is the cornerstone of judging operations. While the Event Director and Program Delivery Partner (PDP) set the overall event structure, the JA ensures the judging process is fair, consistent, and aligned with official award criteria. Their responsibilities extend into both pre-event planning and event-day execution, making judging a significant component of overall tournament administration.

Pre-Event Planning for Judging

Several tasks must be addressed before teams arrive on event day:

- **Judge Recruitment and Training:** Judges must be recruited, confirmed, and provided with training resources. The JA is responsible for ensuring all judges understand the process and award criteria.
- **Building Judge Panels:** Panels are constructed to balance experience and perspective. Larger events may require multiple panels that deliberate together later.
- **Judging Schedule:** In collaboration with the Event Director, the JA develops the judging schedule. Structured interviews must be scheduled for every team, with enough buffer time between sessions for Judges to take notes and reset.
- **Coordination with Other Operations:** The JA works with the inspection and match scheduling teams to ensure judging does not conflict with required activities such as robot inspection or early qualification matches.

These tasks anchor judging within the broader event plan, ensuring that the process is not rushed or sidelined once match play begins.

Variation Across Event Levels

The scale of judging grows with the level of event. At League Tournaments and Qualifiers, a single JA and modest panel can manage the process. By the time teams advance to a Regional or Premier Event, judging requires a carefully structured team of adults, multiple interview rooms, and close coordination with scheduling and ceremonies. Event Directors should expect the JA to guide this process, ensuring that teams experience a consistent, positive, and fair judging environment at every level.

Table 60: Judging Expectations by Event Level

Event Level	Judging Expectations
Level 0 – Scrimmages & Off- Season	Judging may be offered as practice, often with reduced formality. Judges can use these events for training, and teams may benefit from feedback without awards.

Event Level	Judging Expectations
Level 1 – League Meets	League meets do not have a required judging component, and organizers of League meets should not expect to integrate judging into their event. Like at scrimmages, judging may be offered as practice at a league meet, but this is up to the discretion of the organizers.
Level 1 – League Tournaments & Qualifiers	Full judging is required. The JA recruits and trains judges, sets a formal judging schedule, and ensures all awards are presented as required by the <i>Competition Manual</i> .
Level 2 – Regional Championships	Judging expands significantly: multiple panels, deeper deliberations, and higher expectations for documentation. The JA coordinates across divisions if necessary and manages a larger volunteer group.
Level 3 – FIRST Championship & Premier Events	Highly formalized judging. The JA works within a large leadership team, ensuring consistency across divisions, adherence to scripts, and integration with broadcast-quality award ceremonies.

Pit Operations

Pit Administration is the information and support hub of the tournament. It anchors the pit area as a central place where teams, volunteers, and spectators can go for answers, resources, or help when something goes wrong. From incident intake to lost-and-found, the Pit Admin Supervisor plays a critical role in maintaining a safe, informed, and welcoming environment.

Because of this, Pit Administration must be considered in pre-event planning. Establishing clear processes for incident management, lost and found, and pit communications ensures that when event day arrives, the Pit Admin Supervisor can focus on supporting participants instead of improvising solutions.

Pre-Event Planning

- **Incident Management Framework**

Pit Admin is often the first place participants bring concerns. A clear plan for handling medical and non-medical incidents should be established before the event. This includes:

 - Confirming how incidents will be reported (*FIRST* Reporting Portal, local venue procedures).
 - Aligning with the Event Director and PDP on who to notify and when.
 - Ensuring signage or QR codes for reporting links are available in the pit area.
 - Reviewing the event’s safety plan and clarifying how Pit Admin connects into it.
- **Lost and Found / Reunification**

Pit Admin typically manages lost items and serves as the first contact point for lost participants. Before the event, confirm:

 - Where unclaimed items will be stored and how they will be returned.
 - The process for reuniting lost children with parents/guardians, in coordination with the venue and Event Director.

- **Integration with Other Roles**

The Pit Admin Supervisor must be looped into planning discussions that affect the pit area:

- With the **Judge Advisor**, to confirm whether portfolios are collected at check-in or in interviews.
- With the **Scorekeeper**, to know when and how match schedules will be distributed.
- With the **Event Director**, to clarify what announcements should be made through Pit Admin.

Pit Admin is more than a check-in desk. It is the front door for safety and communication in the pit area. Clear plans for incident reporting, reunification, and lost items give teams confidence that support is available when needed. By tying directly into the event’s safety and emergency plan, Pit Admin acts as both a service point for teams and a critical node in the tournament’s risk management system.

Pit Admin responsibilities scale with the complexity of the event:

Table 61: Pit Admin Responsibilities by Event Level

Level	Event Type(s)	Pit Admin Considerations
Level 0	Scrimmages & Off-Season Events	A light version of Pit Admin may be used. Focus on having a contact point for teams and a clear plan for incidents. Lost & found may be informal.
Level 1	League Meets, League Tournaments, Qualifiers	Full Pit Admin Supervisor role is expected. Ensure incident management, lost & found, and clear communication of schedules/maps. Coordinate closely with inspection and judging.
Level 2	Regional Championships	Pit Admin expands in scope: multiple supervisors or assistants may be needed, along with more formal lost & found, stronger communication tools (displays, PA), and closer integration with safety/security.
Level 3	FIRST Championship & Premier Events	Highly formalized Pit Admin function with multiple staff. Robust incident reporting, professional signage, integrated lost child/lost item procedures, and coordination with event production and HQ policies.

Incident Management and Safety

Emergencies

The Program Delivery Partner, Event Director and the event site host organization are responsible for having safety and security plans in place for each event. Included in the plan should be topics such as:

- A map of all the emergency exits
- Knowledge of where on-site medical support is located
- Shelter in place plans in the case of severe weather

- Evacuation plans

Teams should have their own safety plans before attending the event. Here are some team-focused recommendations for [Preparing to Safely Attend a FIRST Event](#).

Lost Children

FIRST Tech Challenge events can be very hectic, and it can be easy for a child to get lost amongst the shuffle of a busy event. Ensure you have a plan prior to the event in the instance of a lost child.

In some cases, the team roster will list Coach phone numbers which can be used to reunite team members, in some regions they collect “Day-of” cell phone numbers from each team at check in. Coordinate your plan with your Program Delivery Partner.

Code Adam Guidelines (www.missingkids.com/CodeAdam) are also a great resource.

Medical Incident Reporting

Event volunteers are not responsible for diagnosing student injuries, handing out medication, or first aid equipment. You and other event volunteers should refer medical issues and emergencies to a medical professional on site, such as an EMT. If an incident or illness occurs at an event, the Event Director, Pit Administrator, or another trained delegate should do the following:



www.firstinspires.org/report

- Call 911 if there is any question whether the injured person/persons require urgent medical attention.
- Respond to the scene immediately. Bring a clipboard, pen, or a electronic device to complete the incident report on the [FIRST Reporting Portal](#).
- Complete the incident report for the injured party.

The Event Director or Pit Administration volunteers are responsible for completing incident reports. The incident reporting person should follow the best practices for incident reporting:

Table 62: Best Practices for Incident Reporting

Best Practices for Incident Reporting	
Be Calm	Anyone handling incident reporting should have a calm demeanor. They should be able to collect information and talk to witnesses without assessing fault.
Be Concise	In all conversations with the injured, witnesses, spectators, and/or media always say "the incident is being investigated" without any further comment. It is not the job of the report collector to provide any opinions on the situation at hand.
Be Risk Conscious	Do not imply liability or any payment, as no one knows for sure until all the facts are collected.
Be Prepared	Those taking in incident reports should be able to communicate with the insurance company if necessary. They should also be aware of who they need to share incidents with, including the local Program Delivery Organization or the Event Director.

Although most incidents will not result in a claim, it is better to act on the side of caution and report them. Should an incident result in a claim after the event, the documents will be on file, complete with witnesses and a written report.

Youth Protection Reporting

Issues that are non-medical but are of concern to a participant/participants should also be reported. Anything that happens during an event that made a youth volunteer, team member or spectator feel uncomfortable or threatened should be addressed.

As appropriate and if you feel safe doing to, speak directly with the offending party and try to quickly and calmly defuse the immediate issue. Call the Event Director and/or the Program Delivery Partner and inform them of the issue and seek assistance as needed with any immediate remediation of the issue.

Ensure all issues are reported in a timely manner using the [FIRST Reporting Portal](#). Youth Protection Concerns encompasses a wide variety of one-time or ongoing issues such as suspected abuse, bullying, harassment, discrimination, questionable behavior, or violation to the *FIRST* Code of Conduct.



www.firstinspires.org/report

Reporting Other Issues or Concerns

Feedback about issues such as game play, rule changes, awards, and event management (other than medical/safety issues) are considered program related concerns and not youth protection issues and should be shared with *FIRST* via customerservice@firstinspires.org or by [contacting support](#).

Please note that match results and award results are final and that we will not review match videos.



help.firstinspires.org/s/contactsupport

Safety

An important priority for all volunteers is to observe their event areas to help promote a safe and orderly space for all the participants. It's likely that various volunteers and event participants will bring concerns to your attention, but you should also be proactive in identifying areas of concern.

Prioritize working with the teams to help identify and correct potential safety issues in the area. Please review the section about [Team Interaction and Support](#) for the best ways to work with teams on making changes.

Safety Glasses and Closed-Toe & Closed-Heel Shoes

All volunteers, teams, coach/mentors, and spectators are required to have safety glasses and wear closed-toe and closed-heel shoes while in the pit and competition areas. It is important to watch out for anyone entering these areas without proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and to ask them to put on proper PPE before entering. Some events will have volunteers staffed at the pit entrance with spare safety glasses to pass out. Other events may not have spares to provide.

Pit Spaces

Specific rules governing what teams can have and do in their pit space are covered in the Competition Manual, but the Event Directors may add additional restrictions which must be published before the event based on limitations set by the venue.

Common areas where teams need help to stay safe and within the rules:

- No open flames or sparks.
- Power tools are generally permitted as long as they are not causing damage to the venue.
- Aisles, walkways, and doors should be clear of obstructions.
- Teams may set up practice spaces as long as they are fully within their designated space.
- No structure may be taller than 10 feet.

Show Operations

Event Day Operations

Event day is where weeks/months of planning converge into a live, time-bound experience. Unlike planning—which can pause and resume—event day is continuous. Decisions must be timely, coordination must be tight, and the environment must feel fair and consistent for every team. The Event Director’s job is to keep this ecosystem moving while empowering key volunteers to lead in their domains.

This chapter describes how things run, not how to perform each role. For role-specific procedures, see the Supervisor Guides (Judge Advisor, Head Referee, FTA, Scorekeeper, Pit Admin Supervisor, Volunteer Coordinator).

Event Day Readiness

By the time event day arrives, the planning pieces should already be connected into a workable whole. Even at Level 0 or Level 1 events, where preparation may be lighter, certain elements must be in place for the tournament to run smoothly. These are not “nice to haves” – they are the baseline conditions for delivering a safe, fair, and consistent experience.

The table below outlines the core readiness areas and the minimum expectations before the first team walks in the door:

Table 63: Event Day Readiness Best Practices

Area	Baseline Requirement	Notes / Examples
Schedules	Overall event schedule and judging schedule are finalized.	Shared with teams, JA, and queuers. Adjustments day-of should be minor.
Layouts & Maps	Pit map, venue layout, and parking/load-in instructions completed.	Includes field, queuing, inspection, and spectator areas.

Area	Baseline Requirement	Notes / Examples
Communications	Teams and volunteers have received pre-event comms with expectations and timing.	Emails or packets confirming arrival times, assignments, and logistics.
Technology	Event set up in FTC Scoring/FTC-Live system.	Scorekeeper confirms system runs; displays tested or equipment source identified.
Equipment	Field(s), AV, inspection, and pit equipment sourced and assigned.	Backup plan in place if gaps exist.
Decision Structure	Event Director, PDP, and Key Volunteers aligned on scope and escalation paths.	Matches the Decision Authority Matrix.
Safety & Incident Protocols	Venue safety plan known; incident intake point designated.	Includes exits, shelter, medical contacts, and reporting procedures.

Setup

Event setup bridges the gap between planning and execution. It’s when layouts, equipment, and staffing plans become a physical reality in the venue. A strong setup prevents day-of delays and ensures that Key Volunteers can begin operations on time.

Even at smaller (Level 0/1) events, setup requires dedicated staffing and intentional planning. A good rule of thumb is to have at least 10 volunteers for setup (more for multi-division or large events), recruited in advance. These may include event staff, key volunteers, or local helpers who are only there for setup.

Core Setup Areas

Setup is not just about moving tables and plugging in laptops – it’s about turning abstract plans into a functional tournament environment. Each area of the venue has its own purpose and leader, and covering them all ensures nothing slips through the cracks. The table below highlights the major setup areas and what needs to be accomplished.

Table 64: Areas for Setup

Area	What to Accomplish	Notes / Staffing
Volunteer Prep	Setup crew recruited and scheduled (10+ people recommended). Roles assigned (field build, pit layout, signage, AV, etc.).	Volunteer Coordinator ensures people know when/where to report.
Field & Tech	Fields built, electronics connected, FTC-Live tested. Static mitigation applied if required.	Requires FTA/Field Supervisor + helpers.
Pit Area	Pit tables arranged, power drops taped, pit map posted, team numbers on tables.	Needs general crew + Pit Admin Supervisor input.

Area	What to Accomplish	Notes / Staffing
Registration & Admin	Pit Admin, Volunteer Check-in, and Judge check-in stations set up. Lockable box for PII in place.	Pit Admin Supervisor + Volunteer Coordinator.
Judging Rooms	Rooms signed, furniture arranged, schedules posted.	Judge Advisor verifies before event start.
Safety & Flow	Queue paths taped, traffic areas marked, safety glasses stations stocked.	Queueing Lead + setup helpers.
Signage	Venue signs posted (parking, load-in, pit admin, inspection, judging, restrooms, food, etc.).	At least 2 people dedicated to signage.
Hospitality	Volunteer lounge and concessions/catering area ready. Water available.	VC or Hospitality Lead.
Print Materials	Schedules, pit maps, incident reporting signs, inspection forms printed and distributed.	Follow Printing Checklist (Appendix).

Setup Best Practices

Understanding the core areas to consider in setup provides structure, but strong setup also depends on a few habits that consistently separate smooth events from stressful ones. These principles help EDs and VCs keep setup intentional rather than reactive.

Table 65: Setup Best Practices

Practice	What It Means	Why It Matters
Plan Ahead	Recruit and confirm helpers in advance; don't rely solely on Key Volunteers the morning of.	Prevents last-minute scrambling and ensures enough people are available.
Delegate Tasks	Assign a field build lead, pit layout lead, and signage lead so work can happen in parallel.	Distributes workload and speeds up setup.
Document the Plan	Use a simple venue map marked with "who sets what."	Reduces confusion and keeps everyone aligned.
Respect Consistency	Follow regional standards for static mitigation, inspection setup, and field placement.	Creates predictable experiences across events for teams and volunteers.
Plan for Teardown	Map out load-out routes, storage, and return of borrowed equipment.	Makes closing efficient and prevents equipment loss.

Event Day Flow:

Once setup is complete, the event transitions into a structured series of phases. While each key volunteer leads their area, the Event Director’s role is to **watch the connections between phases** – making sure teams have a consistent experience and the schedule keeps moving.

The table below outlines a typical flow for a single-day tournament. Use it as a reference for what happens when, who leads, and what deserves the Event Director’s attention.

Table 66: Event Day Flow

Phase	What Happens	Key Leads	ED Guidance
Volunteer Arrival	Volunteers check in, report to their area, and finish last-minute setup.	Volunteer Coordinator, Pit Admin Supervisor	Be visible and welcoming; confirm each key area is staffed and ready before teams arrive.
Team Arrival & Check-In	Teams register, set up pits, confirm consent forms.	Pit Admin Supervisor	Monitor flow at check-in; ensure late arrivals or walk-on volunteers are handled smoothly.
Inspection & Judging	Robot inspections and formal interviews begin.	Lead Inspector, Judge Advisor	Verify both schedules are running; encourage use of buffer time for re-inspections.
Practice Matches (optional)	Teams and field staff practice match process & gameplay.	Head Referee, FTA	Confirm the start and stop times for practice matches. Collaborate with FTA on if practice matches will be scheduled or open.
Drivers’ Meeting	Review match process and rules.	Head Referee, FTA	Stand with HR/FTA to signal alignment; keep the meeting concise to maintain schedule momentum.
Opening Ceremony	Welcome teams, volunteers, and guests.	Event Director, Emcee	Keep energy high but brief; confirm advancement criteria are announced clearly.
Qualification Matches	Teams compete in 5–6 matches each.	Head Referee, FTA, Scorekeeper	Stay in touch with HR/FTA to monitor schedule pace; resolve issues quickly to protect match flow.
Lunch Break	Short pause in match schedule.	Event Director	Announce timing clearly; walk pits to confirm teams know when matches resume.

Phase	What Happens	Key Leads	ED Guidance
Playoffs & Awards	Double-elimination playoff bracket; integrated award presentations occur during downtime and at conclusion.	Head Referee, FTA, Judge Advisor, Emcee	Follow the competition manual sequence; coordinate with JA/Emcee to time awards smoothly with playoff flow.
Teardown & Load-Out	Fields disassembled, pits cleared, signage collected, lost & found finalized.	Event Director, Setup Crew	Direct teardown teams; confirm borrowed equipment is returned and venue is left in good condition.

Wrap Up and Reporting

A *FIRST* Tech Challenge event doesn't end with the last award. Post-event work is shared across the leadership team – the Event Director, Key Volunteers, and the Program Delivery Partner all have responsibilities. Wrapping up well ensures compliance, strengthens sponsor and volunteer relationships, and captures lessons that improve future events.

Table 67: Wrap Up and Reporting Steps

Area	What Needs to Happen	Who Leads	Why It Matters
Post-Event Debrief	Hold a short debrief with committee and Key Volunteers within 1–2 weeks. Capture what went well, pain points, and fixes for next time.	Event Director schedules; all KVs & PDP participate	Builds continuity across events and validates volunteer experience.
Reporting Requirements	Submit attendance counts, advancement results, incident reports, and required financial forms. Ensure consent forms and PII are handled correctly.	PDP owns submission; ED/KVs provide data	Ensures advancement accuracy, compliance with <i>FIRST</i> policy, and financial accountability.
Sponsor Recognition & Deliverables	Thank sponsors/partners promptly; share photos, stats, or deliverables promised (e.g., signage photos, social media posts).	PDP leads; ED/Emcee may contribute	Keeps sponsors engaged and supports long-term sustainability.

Area	What Needs to Happen	Who Leads	Why It Matters
Volunteer & Team Recognition	Send thank-you notes/emails to volunteers and teams. Recognize special contributions.	Volunteer Coordinator, Judge Advisor, ED	Reinforces community culture and encourages return participation.
Lessons Learned Documentation	Record key takeaways, unexpected challenges, and creative solutions in a shared folder or doc.	ED drafts; PDP curates; KVs contribute	Preserves institutional knowledge for future events and reduces repeated mistakes.