



**FIRST® ROBOTICS COMPETITION**

# 2026 Judge Manual

**FIRST® is a global robotics community that prepares young people for the future.**

**FIRST  
LEGO  
LEAGUE**

**FIRST  
TECH  
CHALLENGE**

**FIRST  
ROBOTICS  
COMPETITION**

[www.firstinspires.org](http://www.firstinspires.org)

# Table of Contents

---

Table of Contents .....	2
Online Tools for Judges and JAs .....	4
Summary of Changes .....	4
Chapter 1: Introduction to FIRST® .....	5
Chapter 2: Judging Roles .....	6
The Judge Role .....	6
The Judge Advisor Assistant (JAA) Role .....	6
The Judge Advisor (JA) Role .....	6
Chapter 3: General Judge Information .....	7
Types of Events .....	7
Judge Training .....	7
Data Protection Training .....	7
Judge Shirt.....	7
Conflict of Interest.....	8
Judging Schedule & Awards Ceremony .....	8
<i>FIRST</i> is committed to <i>STEM for Everyone™</i> .....	9
Chapter 4: Awards Overview .....	10
Judging Logistics .....	10
Interviewing Teams in Pits .....	10
Philosophy of Judging.....	11
Match Observer (MO) Judges .....	12
Judged Awards .....	12
Award Eligibility.....	13
Cultural Awards (FIA, EI, & RAS) .....	13
Hard Luck Stories .....	14
Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI).....	14
Judging the <i>Gracious Professionalism®</i> Award .....	15
Judging the Rising All Star Award.....	15
Non-Judged Awards .....	15
Chapter 5: FIRST Impact Award Judging .....	16
FIA Award Description .....	16
FIA Award Eligibility .....	16
Ineligible Teams: .....	16
Submission Content and Award Emphasis.....	16
Submission Format.....	17

Submission Process .....	17
<i>FIRST</i> Impact Award Interview Process .....	18
<i>FIRST</i> Impact Award Feedback.....	19
<i>FIRST</i> Impact Award Video .....	20
<i>FIRST</i> Impact Award Judging.....	20
Chapter 6: Dean's List Award Judging .....	21
Dean's List Award (DLA) Overview.....	21
Dean's List Award Submission Process .....	21
Dean's List Award Interview Process .....	22
Dean's List Award Judging .....	23
Dean's List Award Judge Portal.....	24
Dean's List Award District Best Practices.....	24
Chapter 7: JA Processes .....	26
Judge Advisor Box.com Folder.....	26
Judge Advisor Slack .....	26
Recruiting Judges.....	26
Email Communication.....	27
Verifying Judge Training Certifications .....	27
Judging Process .....	27
Judge Deliberations.....	29
Judge Information Packets .....	29
Equitable Award Distribution ( <i>Spread the Wealth</i> ) .....	29
Scheduling Interviews for <i>FIRST</i> Impact Award & Dean's List Award.....	30
Dean's List Award & <i>FIRST</i> Impact Award Meeting Best Practice .....	31
Award Entry System (AES).....	31
Award Scripts.....	32
District Championship (DCMP) Events.....	32
Appendix A: Examples of JAA Responsibilities .....	34
Appendix B: Example Scripts .....	35
Appendix C: <i>FIRST</i> Policies and Forms .....	36
Consent & Release Form (C&R Form).....	36
Walk-On Event Volunteer Policy.....	36
Report a Concern .....	36
Additional Forms.....	36
Appendix D: 2026 Playoffs + Award Order .....	37

# Online Tools for Judges and JAs

---

Please note that some links throughout the manual are only accessible to the Judge Advisor. If you find a link you cannot access, please ask your Judge Advisor.

- [FIRST Dashboard](#) – To create a volunteer profile, login to the *FIRST* Dashboard & apply to volunteer at *FIRST* events.
  - Need help directing someone on how to apply? Check out this [Knowledgebase Article](#).
- Award Judge Portal (Link located within JA Box folder) – To read award submissions pre-interview.
- [FRC Events Webpage](#) – To view event or team information
- [FIRST Robotics Competition Blog](#) – To read updates on various aspects of the *FIRST* Robotics Competition season from Director and other Staff at *FIRST*.
- [FIRST Robotics Competition Game Manual](#) – To read the Game Manual
- [FIRST Robotics Competition Awards Webpage](#) – Information given to teams relating to awards
- [Volunteer Role Descriptions](#) – To view descriptions for all volunteer roles including [Judge](#), [Judge Advisor Assistant](#), and [Judge Advisor](#).
- [Volunteer@firstinspires.org](mailto:Volunteer@firstinspires.org) – An email to ask all volunteer related questions, including about volunteer registration and VMS.
- [Safety@firstinspires.org](mailto:Safety@firstinspires.org) – An email to ask youth protection related questions.

## Summary of Changes

---

- JAs can review a summary of what is new and different for the 2026 season, by viewing the [2026 JA What's New Document](#) (viewable only for assigned Judge Advisors).
- Revision 1 – 11/12/2025
  - Any team with a team number of 10,900 or higher is eligible for the Rookie award for the 2026 season.
  - Any changes after this initial release will be tracked and marked as **UPDATED** or **NEW**.

# Chapter 1: Introduction to FIRST®

---

## **FIRST®**

*FIRST®* (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) was founded by inventor Dean Kamen to inspire young people's interest in science and technology. As a robotics community that prepares young people for the future, *FIRST* is the world's leading youth-serving nonprofit advancing STEM education. For 30 years, *FIRST* has combined the rigor of STEM learning with the fun and excitement of traditional sports and the inspiration that comes from community through programs that have a proven impact on learning, interest, and skill-building inside and outside of the classroom.

*FIRST* provides programs that span a variety of age groups:

- *FIRST®* Robotics Competition for grades 9-12, suggested ages 14-18
  - In *FIRST®* Robotics Competition ages are suggested and teams may have younger members or may be entirely made up of younger members.
- *FIRST®* Tech Challenge for grades 7-12, ages 12-18
- *FIRST®* LEGO® League for grades PreK-8, ages 4-16 (ages and grades vary by country)
  - *FIRST®* LEGO® League Challenge for grades 4-8 (ages 9-16)
  - *FIRST®* LEGO® League Explore for grades 2-4 (ages 6-10)
  - *FIRST®* LEGO® League Discover for grades PreK-1 (ages 4-6)

Please visit our website: [www.firstinspires.org](http://www.firstinspires.org) for more information about *FIRST* and its programs.

## **Gracious Professionalism®**

*Gracious Professionalism* is part of the ethos of *FIRST*. It's a way of doing things that encourages high-quality work, emphasizes the value of others, and respects individuals and the community. With *Gracious Professionalism*, fierce competition and mutual gain are not separate notions. Gracious professionals learn and compete like crazy but treat one another with respect and kindness in the process. They avoid treating anyone like losers. No chest thumping tough talk, but no sticky-sweet platitudes either. Knowledge, competition, and empathy are comfortably blended.

## **FIRST® Robotics Competition**

*FIRST* Robotics Competition combines the excitement of sport with the rigors of science and technology. Teams of students are challenged to design, build, and program industrial-size robots and compete for awards, while they also create a team identity, raise funds, hone teamwork skills, and advance respect and appreciation for STEM within the local community.

Volunteer professional mentors lend their time and talents to guide each team. It's as close to real-world engineering as a student can get. *FIRST®* programs gain access to education and career discovery opportunities, connections to exclusive scholarships and employers, and a place in the *FIRST* community for life.

# Chapter 2: Judging Roles

---

It's really important to the teams that the judging process remains consistent. For this reason, please follow the guidelines laid out in the manual.

If there are unforeseen circumstances – and you are a judge, please contact your Judge Advisor. If you are a Judge Advisor, please contact one of the Global Judge Advisors.

## The Judge Role

A *FIRST* Robotics Competition judge takes on four overlapping roles:

- **FIRST Ambassador:** The judges are ambassadors for the *FIRST* mission throughout the competition. Give positive encouragement to the adult mentors and students.
- **Role Model:** Some students have never met an engineer, scientist, or professional business leader. *FIRST* relies on individuals who have excelled in their career fields to be the role models for our students to emulate. During your time as a judge, demonstrate a sense of humor, talk about your own personal path to success, share real-life experiences, etc. **Remember the mission – inspire the students.**
- **Detective:** It is up to the judges to discover which teams deserve awards. Remember, many robots are similar and have nearly identical features. It is your job to find the differences, document them, and be ready to advocate for the best teams using the data you've gathered.
- **Reporter:** Judges' duties also involve writing a short award script that explains why each team was recognized for their award. This script is read at the award ceremony; your notes will be used to construct a succinct and informative description of each award-winning team's performance. Take plenty of detailed notes!

In order to ensure that judges have an appropriate level of education and/or real-world experience, *FIRST* has a minimum age of 18 for judges but prefers that judges are 21. Exceptions to the minimum age can be made on a case-by-case basis but should be discussed with the local planning committee, Volunteer Coordinator, and Judge Advisor.

## The Judge Advisor Assistant (JAA) Role

A Judge Advisor Assistant (JAA) assists the Judge Advisor and judges before, during, and after the competition. The Judge Advisor Assistant functions as a liaison between the judge room, teams, and other volunteers. The JAA divides their time between keeping the judge room organized and gathering and delivering info between teams and judges.

Not all events will have a Judge Advisor Assistant (JAA). **JAs, talk with the Volunteer Coordinator if you would like a JAA.** The responsibilities of the Judge Advisor Assistant are set by the Judge Advisor. JAs should contact the JAA at least two weeks prior to the event to discuss duties. Check out [Appendix A: Examples of JAA Responsibilities](#) for additional details and recommendations.

## The Judge Advisor (JA) Role

Every event is assigned a Judge Advisor. This person is an experienced judge and receives specific JA Training from *FIRST*. JAs are required to have at least three years of Judging experience and *FIRST* has a minimum age of 23. The minimum age is designed to ensure JAs have the appropriate real-world experience and maturity to work in the role. Exceptions can be granted on a case-by-case basis by *FIRST*. JAs are recruited by local program delivery partners and trained through *FIRST*. Judge Advisors will contact Judges regularly before the start of the competition to relay event and training information.

The JA is the event expert on the judging process. In order to make the event run smoothly, or in reaction to situations that may occur, Judge Advisors may need to adjust the judging process (not the award criteria). The JA does not interview *FIRST* teams, their role is to guide the judging panel through the process and ensure *FIRST* policies and guidelines are followed, all deadlines are met, and award scripts are turned in on time. It is a best practice to have a shadow or trainee Judge Advisor to accommodate growth.



# Chapter 3: General Judge Information

---

## Types of Events

There are two event models used in *FIRST* Robotics Competition. Some areas follow the Regional model, where teams compete at one, larger event that advances teams directly to the *FIRST* Championship. Other areas use the District model. Under the District model, teams compete more frequently at smaller District events, earning points that will advance them to a District Championship. District Championships advance teams to the *FIRST* Championship. District teams can compete in Regional events and win awards (except the Cultural Awards) but will not earn district points. Regional teams may not compete at District events.

## Judge Training

All judges must adhere to the [Judge Room Covenants](#). Judge training is critical for volunteers each season. These short, **required** training courses will update you on changes in the award process. There is a required judge training for each of the following:

- General Judge Training ~ 60 minutes
- Dean's List Award Judge Training ~ 20 minutes
- *FIRST* Impact Award Judge Training ~20 minutes

The required training is a series of videos that covers the basics of being a judge and the judging process. Anyone serving as a *FIRST* Impact Award Judge or Dean's List Award judge are required to complete the General Judge Training before they can complete the specific FIA or DL training.

Volunteers who apply to a role **or** are assigned to a role that requires training and certification, will be assigned that training in the *FIRST* Dashboard. If you have any questions on accessing the trainings, please refer to the [Knowledgebase Articles](#) or reach out to [training@firstinspires.org](mailto:training@firstinspires.org) for assistance.

Judge training is accessible through the [FIRST Dashboard](#). Judges will be alerted when the judge training is available by their Judge Advisor or Volunteer Coordinator. To complete testing:

1. Login to the [FIRST Dashboard](#)
2. Navigate to the Volunteer Registration Tab
3. Click the **"FIRST Training"** button and this will bring you directly to the training site. Alternately, you may also go directly to [training.firstinspires.com](https://training.firstinspires.com) and click the "My Training Portal" tab to see courses assigned to you.
4. From there, you will be able to access any required trainings

The JA is responsible for ensuring that each judge has completed the certification (JAs should check out the [Verifying Judge Training Certifications section](#)) and is knowledgeable enough to complete their duties which may include contacting them for one-on-one training prior to judging. We suggest that JAs use the first 15 minutes at the event to allow for a review of important points and answer any questions from judges.

## Data Protection Training

All Dean's List Award Judges and Judge Advisors are required to complete Data Protection Training before beginning judging. Training can be accessed through the *FIRST* Dashboard using the same method described above to access the Judge Training. It should take you approximately 15 minutes to complete the certification.

## Judge Shirt

Judge Advisors and judges are provided with a blue judge polo that **must be worn**, and visible, at all times while performing judge/JA duties. This shirt allows teams and other event participants to recognize judges. New judges are provided a shirt at their event and veteran judges should wear their judge shirt from previous years or can ask for another one if needed.

**Note:** Active military personnel must wear their blue Judge shirt while serving in their judge role.

Judges & JAs should **only** wear the blue judge polo at events while serving in those roles. **Do not** attend an event you are not volunteering at wearing the judge polo.

Remember, Judge Advisor Assistants wear the event volunteer shirt and **NOT** the blue judge polo.

## Conflict of Interest

Judges are required to disclose any team affiliations by signing a [Conflict of Interest form](#) prior to starting their role. This protects the integrity of the judging process. *FIRST* understands that conflicts of interest are impossible to avoid completely and supporting a team does not mean you are automatically disqualified from serving as a judge. Anyone judging with a conflict of interest with a team at the event, must discuss with the Judge Advisor.

Conflicts can include things like:

- being on a team,
  - if you are a Mentor or Team Volunteer – recuse yourself from judging that specific team.
- having an immediate family member on a team,
  - a distant relative (e.g nephew) who is on a team is likely not a conflict of interest
  - your brother mentors a team – recuse yourself from judging that specific team.
- sponsoring a team
  - being an employee at NASA does not mean that you cannot judge every NASA team unless you were involved with the day to day of the team
  - being an employee at Boeing where you apply to get the team a grant - recuse yourself from judging that specific team.
- If you are unsure, check with your Judge Advisor!

However, *FIRST* requires judges to act with professional integrity by voluntarily abstaining from advocating for any teams where a conflict of interest exists. Conflicts of interest can be either positive (in favor of a team) or negative (against a team). If a judge feels they cannot be impartial at a particular event, they may be assigned a different volunteer position at the event. Any concerns regarding conflicts of interest should be addressed with the JA.

### Reminders:

- If you are a mentor and your team is up for discussion, you **must** recuse yourself from the discussion.
- Being harder on a team, to prove you do not have a Conflict of Interest is a conflict.
- If the team you mentor or sponsor wins an award, DO NOT go through the award line with the team. This helps avoid the appearance of bias.

## Judging Schedule & Awards Ceremony

Schedules vary for each event - talk with your JA to learn the schedule. Judges are **required** to be present on both days since judging is a two-day process. The judges will have their own private room at the venue to conduct their deliberations. Typically, breakfast and lunch will be provided for all volunteers on both days. Judges are required to adhere to the schedule set by the JA in order to keep the judging process moving smoothly.

Judges are introduced and encouraged to stay to help recognize award recipients as they come to receive their award. Judge attendance and participation is highly encouraged, we want all judges (or as many as possible) to help pass out awards during each break. If a judge is unable to attend, they should discuss this with their JA. The JA will explain the award ceremony process for your event.

All judges should participate during each award break to help celebrate our students.



## **FIRST is committed to STEM for Everyone™**

*FIRST* is a global robotics community that prepares young people for the future, and key to our strategic intent is to serve every student, everywhere. This commitment includes promoting and engaging in initiatives that ensure a welcoming community for all participants, including students, adult mentors, coaches, and volunteers.

### **STEM for Everyone™ Statement**

*FIRST* is committed to fostering, cultivating, and preserving a culture of unity. We embrace and celebrate our global community. Exploring, developing and implementing strategies to ensure opportunities for any young person who engages in our programs is critical for *FIRST* to fulfill its mission. ALL young people should have the opportunity to become science and technology leaders who have the skills, confidence and resilience to build a better world.

### **Welcoming All**

Comments from a person in an authority position, like judging, can have significant impact, good or bad, on students. As a person in a position of authority, judges need to be conscientious of their questions and comments when interacting with students. The way students express themselves and their beliefs if it is done in a respectful manner should not influence judging in any way. Some examples of ways we have seen students express themselves are through pins, apparel, jewelry, hair color and hair design. When interacting with students, please keep the following in mind to ensure your interactions make all students feel valued and welcomed:

- Treat all students with respect.
- Be open to talking to any student about all award types.
- Don't make assumptions. Avoid using pronouns unless you know them. If you need to talk to another student and don't know their name, ask to speak to "them" or "the student in the hat" rather than using gender specific pronouns.
  - It is the best practice to introduce yourself with your preferred pronouns, e.g., "Hello my name is Sarah. My pronouns are she/her." This tells people how to address you and opens the door for them to tell their preferences.
- When asking questions about the team, avoid reinforcing binaries (e.g., how many boys and how many girls are on the team). Instead ask them to describe their team and how it reflects their school or community.

# Chapter 4: Awards Overview

---

## Judging Logistics

During the event, judges are given different assignments to share the workload. Some judges will visit the pit area to conduct interviews, some judges will be designated as Match Observers (see [Match Observer \(MO\) Judges](#)) to record details of how the robots performed on the field, while other judges will be designated as *FIRST* Impact Award (see [Chapter 5: FIRST Impact Award Judging](#)) or Dean's List Award judges (see [Chapter 6: Dean's List Award Judging](#)) and will conduct scheduled interviews. The pit is an area where teams set up and perform maintenance on their robot when they are not competing. Judges will be issued a pit map which will indicate each team's pit location. Judges are also free to visit teams in the stands, practice fields, or in queuing lines for their matches.

## Interviewing Teams in Pits

Teams may be competing in a match while you are looking for them. If they are not in the pits, they might be in the queue or at a practice field. Be patient with the teams and try returning in a few minutes. You can also find them in the queue or practice field if needed or make an appointment with the team to visit them in the pits. **DO NOT** skip a team just because they are not in their pit when you stop by.

Judges are encouraged to take team provided materials and review them as time allows. Materials are not typically returned to teams so teams should not give them the only copy. There are no restrictions on page limits of documents but please be aware that judges are not expected to review every piece of material handed to them during the event and teams are encouraged to include the most relevant information in their interview with the judges.

Judges should not touch a team's robot unless directly invited by the team. These robots are complex, and we must avoid even the perception that any issue with a team's robot may have been caused by a judge.

When interacting with teams, judges should strive to be as fair and impartial as possible. Judges should remember that even if they personally know the team, this is an opportunity for the students, who may have never spoken to the judges before, to shine. Judges should evaluate teams based on information exchanged during interviews, not information known to the judge from experience or other sources.

For some students, a judge may be one of the few (or only) affirming adults they interact with. What an opportunity to make sure that the student feels seen and valued! A judge is not only a person who is reviewing a team's work, they also should be a role model and ambassador of *FIRST*'s commitment to *STEM for Everyone*™. As such, judges behavior and interactions with all must demonstrate the commitment that they and *FIRST* have to *STEM for Everyone*™ through respectful and polite interactions. All questioning in a judging session must be related to the competition. Opinions and questions around political, personal or divisive topics are not relevant and should not be asked.

Additionally, while *FIRST* permits the judges to correspond with teams that make a particularly strong impression, for reasons of privacy and safety, that correspondence should only be through an adult mentor and not directly with a student. If a student emails a judge asking for career-related advice, they may answer the student but **must** cc a mentor or parent/guardian.

## Guidance for interacting with students

We want to provide an environment where students feel confident sharing their ideas and thoughts with judges through receptive, reciprocal conversation. The best way to achieve this is to treat all students with respect, patience and understanding. Here are some best practices while interacting with students:

- Judging will be a new experience for many students, and they may understandably be nervous, especially at the beginning. Speak clearly and face the team directly when speaking to make it easier for them to hear and understand. Pause and allow students time to formulate an answer or ask a question if they don't understand.

- Not all students are comfortable looking directly at you. No matter the reason, do not equate this as being disrespectful but rather be understanding and an attentive listener. Ask follow-up questions if appropriate, respecting the effort and knowledge the student shares.
- Consider a different greeting and closing than a handshake or high-five. Not all students will welcome physical contact.
- Event days are often long. This can be stressful for anyone to manage and can take a toll on a student's concentration, movements, and energy.
- As a judge, if you sense the team may need a few moments to collect themselves, ask if they would like this time before starting or continuing. Judges should recognize that a student using this time has identified this as an appropriate coping method that helps every team member be successful.
- Be sure to give the team your full attention because they have worked hard to get here and are excited to share information about their team. Avoid chewing gum, eating, or playing with your phone while interacting with the teams.
- You may not be able to ask the same number of questions for all teams. Ask your most important questions first so you can assess all teams fairly during deliberations.
- Some students may not speak English as their primary language. A translator or interpreter may be used during judging sessions. Extra time may be needed to ensure the team has sufficient time to respond to interview questions.

Judges can reference the [Tips for Interacting with Teams](#) for additional tips.

## Philosophy of Judging

*FIRST* recognizes both on-field performance, and the attributes that help *FIRST* achieve its mission to change culture by inspiring young people. Awards are earned by teams for their ability to play the game, while judges determine the awards given for off-field performance. Awards fall into two general categories: Machine, Creativity, and Innovation (MCI) and Team Attribute (TA). MCI awards recognize the technical accomplishments of teams in planning, designing, construction and operation of their robots. TA awards recognize the success of teams in developing strong partnerships with their community, recruiting members, fundraising, and outreach efforts to spread *FIRST*'s message.

Interaction between judges and students is a very important component of the *FIRST* experience. The awards process is a vehicle used to inspire students and show the future that awaits them if they continue their studies. The awards help facilitate positive student interaction with judges who are successful professionals who can recognize their achievements and encourage them to continue learning. If a team has questions about judging, direct them to the JA. **DO NOT** answer any questions related to why certain teams were or were not selected for specific awards.

The guidelines for all awards **should not** be viewed as strict criteria that should be met to win any award. Rather, *FIRST* asks that judges use these guidelines as a framework in deliberations to arrive at decisions that will have the greatest positive impact on students. All award winners should be recognized as being fine examples of the award guidelines, they may not necessarily be the "best" team as you will need to "spread the wealth" and not give multiple awards to one team even if they are the "best" team for several awards. This idea will help with deliberations.

If you have any concerns or questions about the judging process that the JA cannot answer, please contact the [local Program Delivery Partner](#) or Event Manager to discuss and they will bring in *FIRST* if needed.

## Focus on Inspiring

Our focus in *FIRST* is on inspiring young people to become STEM leaders, not who did the work. There is no requirement that students do all of the work and in fact, we encourage that students and mentors work together. A team's accomplishments **should not** be discounted even if you believe that mentors did some or all of the work.

Judges are encouraged to give high-level positive feedback (e.g. "cool robot", "great teamwork", "this project is so cool", etc.) to teams. Judges **should not** give any specific feedback about what would have made them a stronger candidate for an award.

## Sibling Teams

FIRST Robotics Competition considers multiple teams associated with one organization as Sibling Teams. FIRST has released [Guidelines for Sibling Teams](#). As noted in the guidelines, Sibling Teams should be considered separately for all awards (with the caveat of FIRST Impact Award) and judges will use the information provided to them by each team individually to assess the team and robot. With these guidelines in place, we ask judges to think about Sibling Teams for awards in a similar way as if two non-sibling teams collaborated (e.g., if two teams from different schools collaborated on an outreach event, judges should consider which team provided better information during the interview and the role they played in the event).

## Match Observer (MO) Judges

Match Observer (MO) judges help with the issue that judges may not have time to watch matches and properly assess teams for the awards. Each event should designate at least 2 judges as MOs.

The MO's task is to watch matches and take notes on the performance of the teams to share with the other judges. Pit judges should validate what teams tell them with the Match Observers. MOs will share any info they gather while observing to be sure that the judges talk to those teams. Pit judges should communicate with the Match Observers about any info they learn throughout their interviews and ask the MOs to pay special attention to those teams to validate the info. To help Match Observers know what to look for, please refer to the [Technical Judges Tip Sheet](#).

Match observers should note performance by team number and include notable performances/events on the field (i.e. autonomous mode performance, significant breakdowns, creative strategies of play, sportsperson-like conduct). They can also provide insights to other judges on teams with cool imagery, *Gracious Professionalism*, and Team Spirit. Match observations are an additional point of information used to augment findings from interviews and pit observations.

## Judged Awards

**Note:** Most of the Award Descriptions & Guidelines have been updated for the 2026 season.

For a full description of all awards, please see the [Award Workbook](#). To be eligible for any award, teams will be required to follow FIRST Core Values, demonstrate *Gracious Professionalism*, and implement and follow appropriate safety practices. Please see [Award Eligibility](#) for more details.

## Awards Based on Machine Attributes

- **Autonomous Award sponsored by Google DeepMind**– Celebrates the team whose machine has demonstrated consistent, reliable, high-performance robot operation during autonomous (i.e. non-operated guided) actions during match play. Evaluation is based on the robot's ability to sense its surroundings, position itself or onboard mechanisms appropriately, and execute tasks.
- **Creativity Award sponsored by Rockwell Automation** – Celebrates a creative robotic component, concept, or attribute that enhances strategy of play that was intentionally designed and not discovered.
- **Excellence in Engineering Award sponsored by Littelfuse** – Celebrates the team whose machine incorporates an engineering solution designed to have components work together seamlessly.
- **Industrial Design Award** – Celebrates the team whose machine demonstrates industrial design principles, striking a balance between form, function, and aesthetics.
- **Innovation in Control Award sponsored by nVent** – Celebrates an innovative control system or application of control components – electrical, mechanical or software – to provide unique machine functions.
- **Quality Award** – Celebrates machine robustness in concept and fabrication.

## Awards Based on Team Attributes

- **Engineering Inspiration Award (EI) sponsored by SpaceX** – Celebrates a team who demonstrates outstanding success in advancing respect and appreciation for engineering within a team's school or organization and community.
- **Gracious Professionalism® Award** – Celebrates outstanding demonstration of *FIRST* Core Values such as continuous *Gracious Professionalism* and working together both on and off the playing field.
- **Imagery Award in honor of Jack Kamen** – Celebrates attractiveness in engineering and outstanding visual aesthetic integration of machine and team appearance.
- **Judges Award** – During the course of the competition, the judging panel may decide a team's unique efforts, performance, or dynamics merit recognition.
- **Rising All-Star Award** – Celebrates the team that has persisted through challenges, despite the difficulties of being young. This could be the result of being a new team, or a team with recent turnover in membership.
- **Rookie All-Star Award (RAS)** – Celebrates the rookie team exemplifying a young but strong partnership effort, as well as implementing the mission of *FIRST* to inspire students to learn more about science and technology.
- **Team Spirit Award** – Celebrates extraordinary enthusiasm and spirit through exceptional partnership and teamwork furthering the objectives of *FIRST*.
- **Team Sustainability Award sponsored by Dow** - Celebrates a team which has developed sustainable practices that focus on a “triple bottom line” (i.e. People, Prosperity, and Planet) to have a positive impact and achieve long-term continuity.

## Award Eligibility

If a judge or JA witnesses a team's ungracious behavior, the JA should talk to the team mentor and remind them that the team *could* be disqualified for awards based on their behavior. Do not disqualify a team for an award for ungracious or unsafe behavior without talking to the Judge Advisor first. Safety is our #1 priority, if you see something, say something! Remember that one person's actions do not represent the entire team, and a mentor cannot correct the action if they are unaware of it. The JA can then talk with the team or could alert the PDP to investigate the report and talk to the team mentor. A judge should not be the one to talk with a team about a behavior issue (even if they know the team), it must be the Judge Advisor, Event Management, or the Program Delivery Partner.

FRC has two rules related to being a good person. The expectations are outline in rules [G201](#) and [E102](#). As noted in the Event Rules, “egregious and frequent violations may be shared with the Judge Advisor which could lead to disqualification from awards.” Teams are aware that their actions at the event can influence judging. The JA should check with other key volunteers to see if they have witnessed examples of teams showing GP, teams being ungracious, and team safety practices. The JA decides what reported behaviors to share with the judges. As a reminder, a yellow or red card does not always mean that a team is being egregious as there are game play reasons for receiving a card, but some instances may be due to behavior. Please check with the Head Ref if you are unsure.

If the JA feels that a team should be disqualified from receiving awards for behavior, that JA must contact the Global Judge Advisors to review the situation. If *FIRST* agrees with the recommendation, the JA will consult with the Program Delivery Partner to confirm that they agree. If both *FIRST* & the PDP agree, then the JA will work with the Event Management and/or Program Delivery Partner to let the team know. In collaboration with FRC leadership, egregious behavior can be shared with future events. Please reach out to *FIRST* Staff with any instances so they may review the situation prior to the next event.

*Note: Removing a team from awards should be a rare occurrence and only occur in extreme situations after consultation with FIRST.*

## Cultural Awards (FIA, EI, & RAS)

Cultural Awards are the awards that have the most impact on the community and may qualify the team to move on to the District Championship or *FIRST* Championship. See details on our [Championship Eligibility webpage](#). The three Cultural Awards are the *FIRST* Impact Award (FIA), Engineering Inspiration (EI), and Rookie All Star (RAS).





Once a team has won a cultural award, they may not win that award again at the same level of competition. For example, if a team wins the *FIRST* Impact Award at their first event, they may not win the *FIRST* Impact Award at their next event but could win the Engineering Inspiration Award or any other award.

- District teams are not eligible for any cultural award while competing at a different District event or Regional event, but can win any other award.
- Regional teams have no additional restrictions while competing at Regional events.

JAs - Please use the Award Eligibility Report (see the [Award Entry System \(AES\)](#) section for details) within the Award Entry System (AES) the week of your event to ensure you know which teams are ineligible for previously won cultural awards.

*For example: A team may only win EI at one event, they cannot win EI at another event until they reach the District Championship or Championship event. However, if they win EI at an event, they can for example still win the FIRST Impact Award at another same-level event.*

## FIRST Impact Award & Dean's List Award Portals

*FIRST* has an online award portal link where judges who are assigned to judge the *FIRST* Impact Award and Dean's List Award can access submissions. Judges assigned to judge these awards should review the submissions **before** the event. When the judge portal is opened, Judge Advisors are notified, and they may provide award judges with the link. Judges will be able to log in to the site using their *FIRST* account credentials (email and password). Below are the open and close dates for team/student award submissions for this season and *tentative* dates for the Judge Portal:

Award	Submission Open Date (ET)	Submission Close Date (ET)	Judge Portal Open
Dean's List Award	Thursday, October 30 2025 12pm	Thursday, February 5 2026 3pm	Monday February 9 2026
FIRST Impact Award	Thursday, October 30 2025 12pm	Thursday, February 12 2026 3pm	Monday February 16 2026

**Note:** Please note if a student/team at an event asks to interview but is not in the portal, you **must** contact the JA who will then contact the Global JAs to confirm. **DO NOT interview them without approval from FIRST.**

## Rookie All-Star Award

All rookie teams are eligible to receive the Rookie All Star Award. The exception here is a team cannot win the Rookie All Star Award twice, so if they already won, they cannot win again at the same level of competition. Any team with a team number 10,900 or higher is eligible for Rookie Award.

Building a robot that is appropriate to the game's challenges means "did they build a robot or not". If yes, they are eligible for the award. How good the robot is compared to other rookie teams at the event is irrelevant.

**Note:** Not awarding the Rookie All-Star award when there is a rookie at the event, should be a rare event and only happen in extreme circumstances because we want to inspire as many teams as possible. If you have any questions on this, please contact your JA who may contact one of the Global Judge Advisors.

## Hard Luck Stories

All awards should be granted based upon something positive and uplifting. Rather than rewarding a team for the hardships they had; reward them for their perseverance, determination, or unique problem-solving skills. The goal is to present each award winner to the audience as exhibiting role-model *FIRST* behavior, rather than presenting them as a victim of circumstance.

## Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Teams are permitted to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to assist in the creation of award submissions, handouts, writing robot code, etc. *FIRST* views AI resources as tools available to students in the same way that CAD programs, Programming Languages, and 3D printers are tools available for their use. Teams using AI to assist with code or



content generation must provide proper credit and attribution, and respect intellectual property rights and licenses. Proper Credit can look like this: Essay created by Team XXXX and ChatGPT.

Judges **should not** discredit a team who uses AI or rank them lower simply for using the tool. Teams should be compared based on what they have accomplished in relation to the award judging guidelines. Additionally, while there are some sites that check if a submission used AI, they are not accurate and should not be used to verify.

Judges can use AI when writing award scripts or providing *FIRST* Impact Award Feedback. Judges who use AI must do so responsibly by crediting it and ensuring accuracy.

## Judging the *Gracious Professionalism*® Award

The *Gracious Professionalism* (GP) Award celebrates outstanding demonstration of *FIRST* Core Values such as continuous GP and working together both on and off the playing field. We recommend asking questions to the teams to get information about how they demonstrated *FIRST* Core Values at the specific event as well as other times of the year. Ensure the team meets the criteria found in the [Award Workbook](#). **EVERY** team you select for an award should display strong GP during your event. Judges may not use team nomination forms for this award (or any award).

## Judging the Rising All Star Award

The Rising All Star Award “Celebrates the team that has persisted through challenges, despite the difficulties of being young. This could be the result of being a new team, or a team with recent turnover in membership.” This is a new award to recognize both rookies and any team with a new beginning. This award can be given to a team with any team number. The purpose of this award is to recognize new teams or teams that have new beginnings. For example, the award could recognize a team in their second or third year or 20<sup>th</sup> year who has undergone significant growth or succeeded despite challenges.

We recommend that judges talk to every team about this award and ask about their “newness” i.e. how long they have been a team or has their team had high turnover. The [Award Workbook](#) has example questions judges can use to help provide information on this award.

As a reminder, this award should not be based on a hard luck situation (refer to [Hard Luck Stories](#)), but more of how they overcame the situation and used it as a learning opportunity. This could include things like having a coaching change, recruiting new members, changing team processes, new facility/tools, or other newness that doesn’t require a major turnover in the student population but has given the team new life/increased success in achieving *FIRST*’s mission.

Judge Advisors should ensure the “new beginning” of the team. They can do this by having another judge panel go back and validate.

**Note:** *This award is optional at all events. Not awarding the Rising All Star Award should be a rare event and only happen in extreme circumstances because we want to inspire as many teams as possible. If you have any questions on this, please contact your JA who may contact one of the Global Judge Advisors.*

## Non-Judged Awards

The following awards are determined either by the teams themselves, match play, or special panels. They are NOT a responsibility of the judges and are not subject to [Equitable Award Distribution \(Spread the Wealth\)](#).

- Woodie Flowers Finalist Award (determined via special panel prior to event)
- Volunteer of the Year Award (determined by the planning committee pre-event)
- Finalists and Winners (determined via matches)

# Chapter 5: FIRST Impact Award Judging

---

## FIA Award Description

The *FIRST* Impact Award (formerly the Chairman's Award) is the most prestigious award at *FIRST*, it honors the team that best represents a model for other teams to emulate and best embodies the mission of *FIRST*. It was created to keep the central focus of *FIRST* Robotics Competition on the ultimate goal of transforming the culture in ways that will inspire greater levels of respect and honor for science and technology, as well as encouraging more of today's youth to become science and technology leaders.

## FIA Award Eligibility

Teams are eligible for the *FIRST* Impact Award at each Regional or District event at which they compete. Please reference the [Cultural Awards \(FIA, EI, & RAS\)](#) section for additional eligibility rules. Teams will be restricted to earning this award once at each level of competition. In other words, once a team has earned the *FIRST* Impact Award at a Regional or District event, they may not interview for, or earn it again that season at a later Regional or District Event.

**Reminder!** If [Sibling Teams](#) plan to submit for the *FIRST* Impact Award, they should choose one of the following options:

- Only one of the teams submits for the *FIRST* Impact Award, or
- Each team can submit and should have different submissions and presentations

*FIRST* Impact Award recipients from District events will go forward to be considered for the *FIRST* Impact Award at the District Championship. *FIRST* Impact Award recipients from Regionals and the District Championships will go forward to be considered for the *FIRST* Impact Award at the *FIRST* Championship.

## Ineligible Teams:

- Hall of Fame - for 5 years
  - [Hall of Fame teams](#) are teams that have already earned the Championship *FIRST* Impact (Chairman's) Award and are ineligible to re-submit for consideration for 5 years.
- First Year Teams
  - Because the *FIRST* Impact Award recognizes sustained excellence and impact, not just a 1-year team effort, it is not possible for any first-year team (including rookie teams and new teams that have been assigned a veteran number) to receive the *FIRST* Impact Award.

## Submission Content and Award Emphasis

The *FIRST* Impact Award is presented to the team judged to best exemplify the true meaning of *FIRST* through measurable impact on participants, school, and community at large with emphasis on promoting science and technology through *FIRST* programs.

While the *FIRST* Impact Award is about “more than robots”, teams often leverage their robots to enhance their impact on the broader community. For this reason, it is expected teams in contention for the *FIRST* Impact Award will have built a robot appropriate to the game's challenges for the season. This does not require the team to have ranked at a certain level during the event but does require teams to put in more than just the minimal effort necessary to field a drivable robot.

The criterion for the FIA has special emphasis on recent accomplishments within the last 3 years. The judges focus on teams' activities over a sustained period, as distinguished from just the robot design and build period.

*FIRST* Robotics Competition is not about machines; it is about the experience of people working together toward a shared goal. Documenting and preserving your team's *FIRST* experience becomes an important component of the overall *FIRST* experience.

## Submission Format

- Each executive summary is limited to 500 characters, including spaces and punctuation.
- The Essay is limited to 10,000 characters, including spaces and punctuation.
- As a team be sure to review the submission and recognize that judges may look to verify claims.
- **New definitions for 2026 season!** To help standardize *FIRST* Impact Award judging, *FIRST* has developed a definition list for terms commonly used by teams. Teams are responsible for policing their own choice of words. Click here to see the [FIRST Impact Award Definitions](#).
  - Please note that teams are strongly encouraged to use the [FIRST Impact Award Documentation Form](#). Note this is not required (i.e., you can still be eligible without this form) but providing it shows the judges that your activities are well planned and documented.

## Submission Process

- The team must enter their team's *FIRST* Impact Award submission, in English\*\*, through the [FIRST Dashboard](#).
  - *FIRST* Impact Award Submissions may be in the team's native language if they are interviewing at an event that speaks their native language. If not, the submission must be in English. If a team wins and their submission was not written in English, *FIRST* will work with them to receive a copy of their translated submission.
- Team Number, Name, and Location are automatically included and provided to the judges.
- Teams will see a question inviting them to submit a link to their *FIRST* Impact Award Video
  - Teams are optionally invited to submit a URL to their *FIRST* Impact Award Video. The video **must be** hosted on a file sharing site and be made public to allow video downloads.
  - The only way to submit a video is through this portal as part of your submission, a USB will not be accepted at the event. Teams cannot edit the URL after it has been submitted but may continue to update the video file as long as the URL does not change.
  - Teams are **strongly encouraged** to test the URL by copying the URL and pasting it into an incognito tab to ensure anyone can access the link.
- Teams will also see a question inviting them to submit a link to their FIA Documentation Form.
  - Teams are optionally invited to submit a URL to their *FIRST* Impact Award Documentation Form. The form **must be** hosted on a file sharing site and be made public.
  - The only way to submit a documentation form is through this portal as part of your submission. Teams cannot edit the URL after it has been submitted but may continue to update the file as long as the URL does not change. **Teams are encouraged to have the file finalized a week before each event to allow judges time to review prior to the event. Any edits that teams make to the file after that may not be reviewed by the judges.**

## Executive Summaries

- Describe the impact of the *FIRST* program on team participants within the last 3 years. Think about percentages of those graduating high school, attending college, in STEM careers, leadership skills, and serving as mentors/sponsors in *FIRST* programs.
- Describe your community along with its unique opportunities and circumstances. Think about your geographic region, diversity of town/school, language barriers, socioeconomic barriers, and cultural expectations.
- Describe the team's methods, with emphasis on the past 3 years, for spreading the [FIRST Mission](#) in ways that are effective, scalable, sustainable, and creative.
- Describe your team's goals and the progress you have made towards them to fulfill [FIRST's Vision](#).

- What impact has your team seen from your efforts described in the above question? How does your team measure impact?
- Please provide specific examples of how your team and team members act as role models for the *FIRST* community with emphasis on the past 3 years. How do you share these best practices with other teams?
- Describe your team's initiatives to Mentor and/or Start other *FIRST* teams with emphasis on activities within the past 3 years.
- What other initiatives have you created, grown, sustained, or participated in (*FIRST* or otherwise) to help inspire young people to be science and technology leaders and innovators? What outcomes have you seen from your efforts in the past 3 years?
- Describe the partnerships and relationships that you've created with other organizations (teams, sponsors, educational institutions, government, philanthropic entities, etc.) and what you have accomplished together, with emphasis on the past 3 years.
- Describe your team's efforts in the past 3 years to promote [STEM for Everyone](#)™ within your team, *FIRST*, and your communities.
- Explain how you ensure your team and the initiatives you have created will be sustainable.
- Highlight one area in which your team needs to improve and describe the steps actively being taken to make those improvements.
- Briefly describe other matters of interest to the *FIRST* Judges, including items that may not fit into the above topics. The judges are interested in learning about aspects of your team that may be unique, particularly noteworthy or had a large impact.
- (OPTIONAL) Please use this space to ask 1 question to your *FIRST* Impact Award Judges which will be answered after each event with feedback from the judges.  
To help teams who may be unsure of what question to put in the optional feedback question, we have compiled a few options that teams may choose from:
  - Is there something more that we can do to improve our presentation?
  - Is there anything missing from our submitted materials?
  - Which outreach activity do you feel we execute most effectively?

**Note:** Questions asking what is required to win the award or inappropriate questions will not be answered.

## Essay

- The essay portion of the *FIRST* Impact Award submission provides teams an opportunity to describe their activities and achievements in narrative form. While judges encourage creativity of expression, the essay must clearly deliver information and facts describing what the team is about. Teams are encouraged to use some of this space to explain how their team is structured and the number of mentors and students on the team. The essay should avoid merely duplicating information provided in the executive summary questions. However, it is appropriate for the essay to further expand on those responses and provide more in-depth discussion of notable team achievements.
- The most effective essays are characterized by an overview of team activities during the last 3 years, followed by in-depth discussion of notable activities during the most recent 12-18 months.

## ***FIRST* Impact Award Interview Process**

Teams who have successfully submitted for the *FIRST* Impact Award will be randomly assigned to an interview time slot at each eligible event. Once the interview schedule has been posted, Pit Admin will make an announcement and teams can see the slot to which they are assigned. Some teams may need to request to change time slots. In order to do so, the team must find another team who is willing to switch. Both teams will then go to Pit Admin and request the time change. Pit Admin is the only group who can approve the change. Pit Admin will alert the JA or JAA. The following process for the *FIRST* Impact Award must be followed to ensure there is a consistent process across all events. JAs should pay special attention to the [Scheduling Interviews for FIRST Impact Award & Dean's List Award](#) section.

- Judges will review the submissions **prior** to the event via the judge portal.
- Prior to interviews beginning, FIA judges should meet to review submissions together and compare questions.
- After each team interview, judges should enter feedback into the portal or write feedback down to add later.
- **FIRST** Impact Award interviews are limited to 12 minutes total; up to 7 minutes for a presentation by the team (which includes set-up) and the remaining time (5 minutes) is for Q&A led by the judges. If teams use less time than 7 minutes for their presentation, judges may use the remaining minutes (out of 12) for Q and A. To ensure consistency, it is very important that all interviews are no longer than 12 minutes.
  - Interviews are conducted in English (with the exception of teams interviewing at events in Brazil, China, Chinese Taipei, Israel, Mexico, Quebec, and Türkiye).
  - Teams needing a translator or sign-language interpreter may include an additional person to act as that translator/interpreter. The translator/interpreter does not need to be a team member. For these teams, the duration of the interview is increased by up to 5 minutes – up to 2 minutes for the presentation and up to 3 minutes for the Q&A portion.
- No more than 3 student team members are allowed to present information or answer questions from the judges. One adult team mentor may attend the interview as a silent observer and later provide feedback to the team, but the mentor is not allowed to provide any assistance during the interview. We **highly encourage** this silent observer in order to provide timely feedback to the team based on observations and noting judges' questions. This feedback can be very valuable in helping teams hone their skills. Teams will not be marked down for having a mentor present. If the mentor provides any assistance during the interview, the judges should respectfully remind the mentor of the rule.

**Note:** These mentors are not allowed to record video or audio or take pictures during the interview.

**Exception:** If necessary, the adult mentor may provide translation services for students needing foreign language or sign language translation. This person does not count as the adult mentor observer.

- Teams may also choose to provide additional materials to the judges to review, but it is strongly recommended that the materials are no larger than one 2" 3-ring binder (or equivalent volume if spiral wound) and include the **FIRST** Impact Award Documentation Form described above. It's also recommended that materials be in a single bound unit, and not as multiple handouts. Judges may not have time to review all material that is provided to them, but these materials do help them verify any additional questions they have. The binder should focus on the team's activities going back no more than 3 seasons. Please do not try to document your team's entire history in the materials given to judges.
- Many teams will bring additional documentation to the interview to leave with the judges. The judges should take the material graciously from the team, as teams often work many hours on this material. The judges may use the additional material as part of their deliberations. These materials should be returned to teams via the Judge Advisor Assistant following deliberations.

**Note:** Do not send any material back to **FIRST**, as it will be discarded.

- Once the **FIRST** Impact Award winner is determined, the JA will review the winning video for content (if available) and share the link of the video with the production crew. The production company will then download the video and play it after the winner is announced. If something is wrong with the video or there is no video available, the JA should alert the Production company, so they are aware.

**JAs** - Be sure to talk to your [PDP](#) to ensure the production company is aware of this process and has the internet to download videos. If not, talk with your PDP about ways to download videos in advance.

- After the **FIRST** Impact Award winner has been decided, the JA or JAA will return all **FIRST** Impact Award materials to the teams.

## FIRST Impact Award Feedback

Judges will fill out feedback for each team that interviews at an event on both their presentation and submission and will enter this into the **FIRST** Impact Award Judge Portal. This feedback will be shared with the team 48 hours after the event. The feedback will answer 2-3 questions:

1. An area the team has an opportunity to improve,



2. Something that really impressed the judges, and
3. A team submitted question (this question varies by team - see the last executive summary).

This does mean judges may want to bring a laptop to fine tune feedback on site together. By the end of the event, all feedback should be submitted into the *FIRST* Impact Award Judge Portal. See the [FIRST Impact Award Judging Guidelines](#) for tips on entering feedback.

The portal will show empty red circles if no feedback has been entered and will change to full green circles if feedback has been entered to make it easier to track which teams have feedback entered. If a team does not interview at an event even though they are in the judge portal, no feedback needs to be entered even though the portal will show them as empty red circles.

**Note:** Please note that only 1 Judge may edit feedback at a time so if a judge starts entering feedback for a team, they are the only judge who can edit their submission for that event. Their name will show to note which judge started the feedback. JAs can edit any feedback entered by a judge but once they do, the judges can no longer edit their feedback. We ask that JAs review feedback from judges to ensure it is appropriate and adjust as needed. 48 hours after the event, the feedback will be available to the teams and can no longer be edited.

**Reminder!** Feedback must be entered into the judge portal **within 48 hours** as the feedback will be automatically shared with the team after that time. This timing was put into place to ensure teams receive timely feedback so they can make edits to their presentation if desired.

## FIRST Impact Award Video

Teams submitting for the *FIRST* Impact Award are invited to optionally provide a video link along with their submission. These videos are made available only to the Judge Advisor to review for content appropriateness. If there are any issues with the video, the video does not have to be shown and the chosen team may still win. The JA should then alert the team at the end of the event to the issue so they can fix it. The team that is awarded the FIA will have their video shown during the award ceremony (if available). The video content may be in the team's native language, but if that language is not English, the team should add subtitles. (More details about video requirements on the [Submitted Awards webpage](#))

**Note:** Unless the team shows the video as part of their presentation, the video should not be judged as part of the submission.

## FIRST Impact Award Judging

**Note:** Do not give practice interviews for any team. Once a team wins FIA they **may not** be interviewed at a later Regional or District. FIA judges only interview teams competing for FIA at that event.

Once all teams have been interviewed, the FIA judges will deliberate and determine the winning team. JAs will only act as facilitator during the deliberations. The judges should ensure they use all available information including the submissions and other materials the teams may provide in the interview. Judges should use the [FIRST Impact Award Judging Guidelines](#) as a resource when reviewing and evaluating the submitted essays and discussing the interviews. This document adds consistency and guide judges on picking the most qualified team to win the *FIRST* Impact Award.

*FIRST* Impact Award Teams have been asked to optionally submit a [FIRST Impact Award Documentation Form](#) to help show the judges they understand the [FIRST Impact Award Definitions](#) and are using the terms correctly. This form is not required but encouraged. Teams are expected to select the appropriate word when submitting their application and during their presentation. This form will quickly highlight their efforts and allow them to quickly verify their claims. After judges deliberate and have their shortlist of contenders, they can use the Documentation Form to verify team's claims.

**Note:** Because the *FIRST* Impact Award recognizes sustained excellence, it is quite likely that winners from a previous year will be top contenders or winner for the current season.



# Chapter 6: Dean's List Award Judging

---

## Dean's List Award (DLA) Overview

In an effort to recognize the leadership and dedication of *FIRST*'s most outstanding secondary school students, the Kamen family sponsors an award for selected 10th and 11th grade\* students known as the *FIRST* Robotics Competition *FIRST* Dean's List Award. There are 4 "categories" of *FIRST* Dean's List Award students:

1. ***FIRST* Dean's List Award Semi-finalists:** the group of 1 or 2 students in their 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade school year\* nominated by each team.
2. ***FIRST* Dean's List Award District Championship Semi-finalists:** The students selected at District events to be interviewed at the District Championship for Finalist consideration.
3. ***FIRST* Dean's List Award Finalists:** The students selected for each Regional and District Championship.
4. ***FIRST* Dean's List Award Winners:** The 10 students selected from the *FIRST* Dean's List Finalists.

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

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

## Dean's List Award Submission Process

A mentor will complete and submit the application in English\*\* for up to 2 students on their team by the deadline. The mentor must not be related to the student for which they are submitting as the team's Semi-finalist.

\*\* Dean's List Award Submissions may be in the team's native language if they are interviewing at an event that speaks their native language. If not, the submission must be in English. If a student wins and their submission was not written in English, *FIRST* will work with them to receive a copy of their translated submission.

## Criteria

Our global *FIRST* community is diverse in thought and experience, and Dean's List Award students reflect the excellence of our community. Criteria for selection of the *FIRST* Dean's List Award shall include, but not be limited to a student's:

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

Each entry shall include the following identifying information:

- Name & location of student's high school
- Year of graduation from secondary school/high school
- How long has the student been involved in *FIRST*? (30-character limit)
- Number of years the student has participated on the team
- Five essays of no more than 800 characters each attesting to why the student has been nominated. **New and updated** Prompts are as follows:

1. Explain how the student embodies the philosophies of *Gracious Professionalism* and *Coopertition* through the *FIRST* Core Values: Discovery, Innovation, Impact, Inclusion, Teamwork and Fun. Please provide examples.
2. How has the student increased the awareness of *FIRST*? Describe the student's interests and/or plans to continue to engage with *FIRST* beyond high school. Please provide examples.
3. How does the student's individual contribution to the team benefit the whole? Please provide examples.
4. Describe the student's experience in and mastery of areas of STEM. This could include, but is not limited to, skills in engineering, software, CAD, fabrication, etc. Please provide examples.
5. Explain the student's leadership to their fellow team members and/or others in the community. How do they motivate others? What is their leadership style? Please provide examples.

Additional Comments – 500-character limit

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

Essays should be specific about the contributions to *FIRST* generally, and to their team specifically. Specific examples are helpful to the judges. Information about the Semi-finalist outside of *FIRST* may also be supportive of the nomination (as it relates to skills learned while in *FIRST*) and is secondary to information about the student's participation in *FIRST*.

## Dean's List Award Interview Process

All Dean's List Award students **MUST** have a signed *FIRST* Consent & Release form in order to receive an interview. JAs will be able to pull a report from the judge portal that shows which nominees have signed or are missing a Consent & Release form (see [Tips for the Judge Portal](#) for more information). Mentors will be instructed to submit a paper copy of their signed form with the team roster (or show that the form has been signed electronically on the roster) at the event in which the student is interviewing.

Tip! JAs - See the [template emails](#) for a suggested email to use when contacting teams.

Students that have been successfully submitted for the Dean's List Award will be randomly assigned to a time slot for an interview. On this interview schedule, the JA must indicate who does not have a signed consent & release form and Pit Admin will track forms (by looking at both the team roster and paper forms) as they are received. Pit Admin must let the JA know if a student's form was not submitted and the JA should let the team's mentor know that the student will be ineligible to receive an interview and be disqualified from the Dean's List Award if the form is not submitted to pit admin prior to the scheduled interview.

Once the interview schedule has been posted, Pit Admin will make an announcement and Semi-finalists can see which slot they are assigned to. Some students may request to change their time slot. In order to do so, the student must find another student that is willing to switch with them. Both students will then come to Pit Admin who can approve the change and Pit Admin must alert the JA or JAA. The following process for the Dean's List Award must be followed to ensure there is a consistent process across all events. JAs should pay special attention to the [Scheduling Interviews for FIRST Impact Award & Dean's List Award](#) section.

- Judges will review the submissions **prior** to the event via the judge portal.
- Each Semi-finalist will be interviewed one at a time. The interview is a brief **6-10 minutes** and will be conducted by a minimum of 2 judges.
  - Interviews are conducted in English (with the exception of teams interviewing at events in Brazil, China, Chinese Taipei, Israel, Mexico, Quebec, and Türkiye).
  - Teams needing a translator or sign-language interpreter may include an additional person to act as that translator/interpreter. The translator/interpreter does not need to be a team member. For these teams, the duration of the interview is **increased by up to 5 minutes**.
- During the interview, students should be given a Dean's List Award Semi-finalist button.

**Note:** We recommend asking for the pronunciation of the student's name at the interview to ensure it is correct if the student is selected and announced as a Finalist or District Championship Semi-finalist.

- This is a conversational interview so there are no presentations or handouts permitted from the student.
- Only the nominated student (non-mentor) is allowed to present information or answer questions from the judges. The one (1) adult team mentor (optional to attend in-person interviews) may observe and later provide feedback to the student, but the mentor is not allowed to provide any assistance during the interview. Students will not be marked down for having a mentor present. If the mentor provides any assistance during the interview, the judges should respectfully remind the mentor of the rule.

**Note:** These mentors are **not** allowed to record video or audio or take pictures during the interview.

**Exception:** If necessary, an adult mentor/assistant may provide translation services for students needing foreign language or sign language translation, so the students and judges may communicate. This person does not count as the adult mentor observer.

- The Dean's List Award judges will choose the Finalists for the event and write comments to be shared with the Championship Dean's List Award judges via the judge portal.
  - At each Regional event, Dean's List judges will select 2 students as Dean's List Award Finalists.
  - At each District event, judges will shortlist the allocated number of students as Dean's List Award District Championship Semi-finalists. Please refer to the [Dean's List Award District Best Practices](#) section for District differences.

**NOTE:** If a student has a preferred name, their name will appear in the judge portal as FirstName (PreferredName) LastName. For example: Sherlock (Adam) Holmes, where Sherlock is the legal name and Adam is the preferred name. Please print the certificate with their preferred name so in this example the name printed on the certificate should be: Adam Holmes.

## Exception: Remote Interviews for Students Who Cannot Attend In-Person

You may occasionally find that a student cannot make it to the event. In these instances, JAs can and should make exceptions and allow this student to participate in their interview remotely. If this situation arises, the JA must let the event's Program Delivery Partner know so they can ensure the student's *FIRST* Consent & Release form is collected prior to the remote interview. The JA must also follow the below best practices:

- Since most *FIRST* students are minors, the JA may not contact any students directly to set up the interviews. Instead, judges must contact the Lead Coach to set up the interviews.
- Interviews may be conducted by phone or video conference, as long as at least 2 judges are participating with the student. This interview does not need to take place concurrently with the event, but if not concurrent, it must happen beforehand. Every Semi-finalist interviewed must have a fair opportunity for selection.
- At least 1 adult mentor/parent must attend the interview. Only the nominated student is allowed to present information or answer questions from the judges. The adult may observe and later provide feedback to the student, but the mentor is not allowed to provide any assistance during the interview. If the mentor provides any assistance during the interview, the judges should respectfully remind the mentor of the rule.

## Dean's List Award Judging

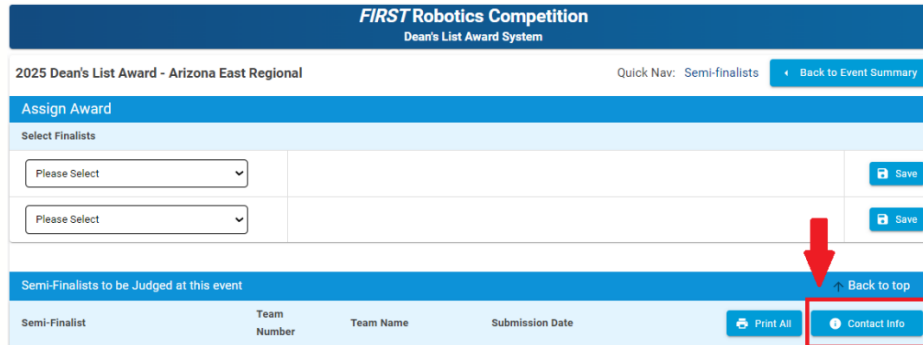
Once all students have been interviewed, the Dean's List Award judges will deliberate and determine the student(s) that are most deserving of the award. Judges should use the [Dean's List Award Judging Guidelines](#) as a resource when reviewing and evaluating the submitted essays and discussing the interviews. This document helps add consistency and guides judges on picking the most qualified students to win the *FIRST* Dean's List Award. The JA will provide copies of this form for the Dean's List Award judges.

## Dean's List Award Judge Portal

Once selections have been made, a member of the Dean's List Award judge panel or the Judge Advisor must enter the winning students' names and judge comments into the Dean's List Award Judge Portal **within 24 hours of the end of the event**. The [DL Award Judging Guidelines](#) shows the questions that the judges need to enter in the portal.

### Tips for the Judge Portal

- There is a report in the Judge Portal that Judge Advisors can access to see a list of Dean's List Award students at the event, their Lead Coach's name and contact information, and the student's electronic Consent & Release form status:



- JAs & Judges can sort the list of students in the DLA Portal by clicking on the various headers (e.g. click team number to sort by team number)

### Reminders for Comments for the Judge Portal:

- Finalists will not be interviewed again by the *FIRST* Championship Dean's List Award Committee. The Committee will rely on comments provided by judges for information on the Finalists when selecting a winner.
- Without verbatim repeating the information contained in the submission, please advise the Championship judges of your overall impressions of the Finalists selected.
- When selecting Finalists, judges should remember that those students will represent *FIRST* and will be driving forces in the *FIRST* alumni community.
- The timely submission of these names is important, as the Dean's List Award winner selection panel reviews each Finalist submission and judge notes.

## Dean's List Award District Best Practices

### Overview

Districts manage the Dean's List Award selection process differently than a regional event due to the number of students who have been nominated. Communication among all the JAs and the Sr. JAs within the district is very important. The Judge Manager and/or Sr. JA should share their plan for implementation with *FIRST*.

### Who will Manage the Dean's List Award in a District?

Some districts may recruit a volunteer for the sole purpose of managing the Dean's List Award, but it can also be the Sr. Judge Advisor. In larger districts where there is a high number of nominations, we recommend someone other than the Sr. JA. For the purposes of this section this volunteer will be called the Dean's List Judge Manager. This person has the following responsibilities:

- Working with their Sr. Judge Advisor to determine how many students (1 or 2) are shortlisted at each event and ensuring there are judges at every district event to judge Dean's List.
- Once nominations close and you have received the team contact information from the JA:

- Create schedule for students interviewing at events. The goal is to balance the number of interviews at each event.
  - Students must interview at an event in which their team is registered.
  - Students nominated from the same team must interview at the same event.
- Reach out to Lead Coaches to notify them of which event their student(s) will be interviewed at and what the interview process is.
  - Remind Lead Coaches that a signed C&R form is required to be submitted prior to the interview. The form can be completed in the *FIRST* Dashboard or via a paper form that is submitted to Pit Admin at the event they are interviewing at. Use the [template emails](#).
- Share the interview schedule with the JAs in your district.
- Answer any questions about the interview process or any requests to reschedule.

## Semi-finalist Interviews

The number of students nominated is too large for all Semi-finalists to be interviewed at the District Championship. Because of this, all student nominees will be interviewed during a District qualifying event and 1 or 2 will be shortlisted at each event. Shortlisted students are then re-interviewed at the District Championship.

## Dean's List Award Judging Steps

1. In December, *FIRST* will contact the District PDP & Senior Judge Advisor to learn who the Dean's List Judge Manager is for the season. *FIRST* will then work with the Dean's List Judge Manager to share information about suggestions, tips, and tools to implement.
2. The Sr. JA or VC must assign the Dean's List Judge Manager to the "Judge-Dean's List" role at the District Championship event. This will grant them access to the Dean's List Judge Portal.
3. The Dean's List Judge Manager should work with their Sr. Judge Advisor to determine how many students are shortlisted at each event (1 or 2) and ensuring there are judges at every district event to judge Dean's List.
4. After the judge portal opens (mid-February), the Senior JA should provide the following to the Dean's List Award Judge Manager via the report found under the event in the judge portal: Semi-finalist names with team number, consent and release status, Lead Coach name, phone number and email, as well as what district events the team is competing. Please note that only the JA is able to pull this report. As it contains PII, ensure that the information is being shared in a secure manner.
5. The Dean's List Judge manager should schedule students for events and contact teams and other judge advisors. The JA for each event will schedule the interviews at that event.:
  - The District Dean's List Judge Manager will notify the Lead Coaches regarding the event at which their Semi-finalists interviews will take place. If 2 students are nominated from the same team, they must interview at the same event. Upon arriving at their designated event, the students should check in at Pit Administration to see when their interview is scheduled for.
  - Please note that the same rules and process apply in regard to *FIRST* Consent & Release forms being required, as outlined in the [Dean's List Award Interview Process](#) section above.
6. Judges follow the same interview process established for Regionals. However, instead of selecting Finalists, they will pick their top 1 or 2 candidates in the Dean's List Award Judge Portal in order to create a shortlist for the District Championship. Shortlisted students are called Dean's List District Championship Semi-finalists. A tool in the Judge Portal helps with the shortlisting process. After the judges complete the primary interviews, they must complete the questions in the Judge Portal for the shortlisted students ONLY and then select those students from the drop-down menu in the shortlist section of the portal.
7. **Ceremonies** - Recognize all the Dean's List Award Semi-finalists attending that event during Opening Ceremonies, ask them to stand and give them a round of applause. At your closing/awards ceremony:
  - The Dean's List Award District Championship Semi-finalists (progressing to the District Championship for consideration for Finalist) will be announced.
  - The shortlisted students are invited to come down during the award ceremony. Provide the names to the Event Manager when you share all award winners. They do not receive an award or certificate.
8. For the shortlisted students, the District Judge Manager should send the Lead Coach an email explaining the plan for interviewing at District Championship.



# Chapter 7: JA Processes

---

Some links in this section will only be accessible by Judge Advisors.

## Judge Advisor Box.com Folder

Box is an online file storage that Judge Advisors Coordinators are required to use to be able to download all files produced by *FIRST* that are pertinent to the JA role. *FIRST* will send invites to the Box Folder once available. We recommend that those who are not familiar with Box, check out [The Basics of Box](#).

**Best Practice:** JAs should download all files from the folder the day before reporting the venue as internet may not be available at the event.

## Judge Advisor Slack

Slack is a messaging app for business that connects people to the information they need. JAs are required to create a (free) Slack account in order to be able to view updates, reminders, and ask questions during the event. We highly encourage JAs to download the app on their phone so they can easily ask questions during the event. We recommend that JAs who are not familiar with Slack, check out the [How to Use Slack Guide](#). If you would prefer to get an email when posts are made, you can configure your slack notification settings by following [these instructions](#).

## Recruiting Judges

Judge recruitment may be performed by a variety of people depending on the event. Discuss who is responsible for it with your [Program Delivery Partner \(PDP\)](#) and Volunteer Coordinator before acting.

The Judge Advisor may be responsible for recruiting all the judges or the JA may share the workload with the Volunteer Coordinator and/or PDP. JAs must work with the VC/PDP early to determine a Judge Recruitment Plan. Recruiting can start as early as six months before the event. JAs can use the [Judge Recruitment Flyer](#) to help recruit judges. JAs can also use the [Judge Recruitment Best Practices](#) and the [FIRST Volunteer Recruitment Strategies Tip Sheet](#) for tips on recruiting judges. We strive to have a judge pool that is representative of the students on the teams and the communities we compete in.

The ideal team to judge ratio for an event is approximately 2:1, 2 teams for every 1 judge. If you are able to recruit this amount of judges, you are able to use either the [Split Judging Model](#) or [Split Award Model](#). Having more judges help ensure that judges always have a partner, pairing experienced/inexperienced judges, pairing technical/non-technical judges, easier to deal with diversity, and easier to deal with any drops.

If you are unable to recruit the ideal number of judges, it is recommended to use the Split Award Model [Split Award Model](#) which better allows for less judges while still ensuring that all teams are seen at least twice and that the correct judging process is being followed. With less judges, it may be harder to pair judges. If you are light on judges, it is recommended to connect with the Volunteer Coordinator to see if any volunteers may be able to fill two roles. For instance, events need many Robot Inspectors initially but less when judging begins and there may be volunteers interested in serving as a Match Observer or even another judge role.

**Reminder:** Two additional judge roles appear in both Volunteer Registration and the VMS allowing volunteers to apply specifically for judging for the *FIRST* Impact Award and Dean's List. Consult with your VC if you prefer volunteers to be able to apply specifically for these roles or if you would prefer to have them hidden. If hidden, volunteers would select the judge role and when you go to assign, you can move them to the *FIRST* Impact Award or Dean's List Award Judging. Volunteers **must** be assigned to these roles to access the judge portals.



## Email Communication

Prior to the event, JAs should email judges to provide information about their role at the event as well as event information. There are [template emails](#) we encourage JAs to use as a resource when connecting with the judges and teams.

## Verifying Judge Training Certifications

As mentioned in the [Judge Training](#) section, Judge Advisors will be responsible for ensuring all of their judges complete the required Judge Training. JAs can check which volunteers have passed the certification through [VMS](#) under the All Reports, Training and Certifications tab. JAs may also choose to work with their VCs to ensure all judges complete the certifications.

## Judging Process

Judge Advisors are able to use either the **Split Judging Model** or the **Split Award Model** when interviewing for the Machine & Team Awards. These methods both ensure that all teams are seen at least twice and that the correct judging process is being followed. The models are similar but start differently with interviewing on Day 1. Both models use the same process to down select and finalize award winners. If for any reason a JA believes that they need to deviate from one of these models, they **must** contact the Global Judge Advisors before the event.

The judge process and pairing for both models is described below but is also provided in the [Judge Pairing Assignments Template](#) that Judge Advisors should use to aid them. Judge Advisors should also use the [Short List Matrix](#) during deliberations

It is imperative that Judge Advisors spend the time to create judge pairings before the event using the judges assigned in VMS. We recommend checking VMS early and if you do not have enough judges, please work with your VC and PDP to find more volunteers (see [Recruiting Judges](#) for more info).

### Split Judging Model

The Split Judging Model is a method that works best with a 2:1 ratio of judges (2 teams for every 1 judge). The philosophy of this method is that judges are split to either focus on Team Awards or focus on Machine Awards.

To use this method, Judge Advisors follow this process:

- Assign 2 or 3 people as *FIRST* Impact Award judges
  - Due to *FIRST*YPP, we require a minimum of 2 judges in an interview room.
- Assign 2 or 3 as Dean's List judges
  - Due to *FIRST*YPP, we require a minimum of 2 judges in an interview room.
- Assign 2 Match Observers
- Then group the remaining judges into 2 categories: one for the Machine Awards and the other for the Team Awards. Each group will be assigned to see a set number of teams and will focus their interviews on either Team or Machine Awards.
  - It's recommended that Judge Advisors reach out to judges in advance to see if they have a preference. There is a [template email](#) (Email to Judges One Month Prior to the Event) that JAs can use as a starting point.
- At the end of Day 1, all teams should have been seen by 2 sets of judges – 1 set focused on Machine Awards and 1 focused on Team Awards.
- Judges can nominate 1-2 teams for each award they judged. If nominating more than 1, judges will need to explain why they feel this team also needs to be considered for this specific award.
  - With fewer judges and/or fewer teams, it will be more common to nominate 2 teams per award.
- JAs will lead a discussion through each award and discuss the teams nominated to confirm the teams are the best for the awards and shouldn't nominate for other awards.
- After all the judges leave for the day, the JAs should then enter information into the [Short List Matrix](#) and follow instructions on the sheet to form new groups for final interviews

- At the start of Day 2, judges are assigned to re-interview teams for specific subsets of awards based on the Day 1 shortlist. The idea is that there is at least 1 judge who nominated each team in the pairing. This means that each of the judges interviewing will have had an opportunity to see the top teams for each award and the judges should be able to come back and amongst themselves help down select.
- In the final deliberations, the JA will help deconflict between awards if needed.
- If time and judges allow, as an option you may also consider doing ambassador interviews to give teams more time to interview.
  - We recommend Judge Advisors make a list of all available teams who are not up for an award. As all judges finish their scheduled interviews, they can then be sent out to interview additional teams.
  - Don't hesitate to use your DL & FIA judges to help with these if they are available.

## Split Award Model

The Split Award Model is a method that can work with any number of judges assigned. The philosophy of this method is that judges are split into groups and focus on Team Awards in the morning and then focus on Machine Awards in the afternoon.

To use this method, Judge Advisors follow this process:

- Assign 2 or 3 people as *FIRST* Impact Award judges
  - Due to *FIRSTYPP*, we require a minimum of 2 judges in an interview room.
- Assign 2 or 3 as Dean's List judges
  - Due to *FIRSTYPP*, we require a minimum of 2 judges in an interview room.
- Assign 2 Match Observers
  - If strapped for judges, you can drop to 1 Match Observer or none but you should instruct judges to watch matches to validate team provided data.
- Then group the remaining judges into groups of 2 or 3. Each group will be assigned to see a set number of teams. In the morning of day 1, they will interview teams for Team Awards and in the afternoon, the same pair will interview the same teams for Machine Awards.
  - It's recommended to ensure that there is at least 1 judge comfortable with technical concepts in each pairing. There is a [template email](#) (Email to Judges One Month Prior to the Event) that JAs can use as a starting point.
- At the end of Day 1, all teams should have been interviewed twice – 1 interview for Team Awards and 1 focused on Machine Awards - but may be interviewed by the same set of judges.
- Judges can nominate 1-2 teams for each award they judged. If nominating more than 1, judges will need to explain why they feel this team also needs to be considered for this specific award.
  - With fewer judges and/or fewer teams, it will be more common to nominate 2 teams per award.
- JAs will lead a discussion through each award and discuss the teams nominated to confirm the teams are the best for the awards and shouldn't nominate for other awards.
- After all the judges leave for the day, the JAs should then enter information into the [Short List Matrix](#) and follow instructions on the sheet to form new groups for final interviews
- At the start of Day 2, judges are assigned to re-interview teams for specific subsets of awards based on the Day 1 shortlist. The idea is that there is at least 1 judge who nominated each team in the pairing. This means that each of the judges interviewing will have had an opportunity to see the top teams for each award and the judges should be able to come back and amongst themselves help down select.
- In the final deliberations, the JA will help deconflict between awards if needed.
- If time and judges allow, as an option you may also consider doing ambassador interviews to give teams more time to interview.
  - We recommend Judge Advisors make a list of all available teams who are not up for an award. As all judges finish their scheduled interviews, they can then be sent out to interview additional teams.
  - Don't hesitate to use your DL & FIA judges to help with these if they are available.

## Best Practices for Judge Pairings

The Judge Advisor is responsible for assigning the judges to interview teams. Important criteria to remember:

- Pair new judges with veteran judges. This will help eliminate anxiety experienced by rookie judges and provide them with an experienced volunteer to answer their questions
- Keep veteran judges interested by varying assignments. Veteran judges may need variety, so explore this with them before the event and ask if they want a different assignment from the previous year.
- Diversify judge pairings to ensure representation (when possible) for both pit interviews and DL & FIA.
- It can happen, especially for new events, that all of the judges will be rookie judges. If you encounter this situation, contact one of the Global Judge Advisors for suggestions on how to handle judge assignments.

## Best Practices for picking Dean's List & FIRST Impact Award Judges

- Need at least 2 judges, 3 preferred, for each award
- Ability to dedicate time in advance to pre-read submissions
- Preference is to have at least 1 experienced FRC judge in each grouping. Should have a maximum of 1 Rookie judge to help expand and grow the judge pool long term.
- Judges should understand the mission of *FIRST* and the skills students can learn and emulate. These awards are not about the robot.
- Judges should be empathetic and connect with the students, while also able to think strategically about the teams' long-term growth and award criteria.
- Assign these judges to the specific roles in VMS so they can access the judge portal and pre-read.

## Judge Deliberations

*FIRST* has created a [JA Deliberations Guide](#). This optional guide that Judge Advisors can use explains various options for how to run deliberations. This guide is especially helpful for Rookie JAs.

Additionally, there is a [Short List Matrix](#) to help expedite the deconfliction for final award selection and this process should be used with either Judging Model. Please refer to the [Short List Matrix Template](#) and Judge Deliberations Guide for more information.

## Judge Information Packets

Make an information packet for each judge (to be distributed at the event). Include:

- Judge Manual (likely only need a couple copies printed for the room)
- [Award Workbook](#)
- Team List
- Judging Assignments
- Copies of the schedule for the entire weekend
- Pit maps (from Pit Administration)
- Safety Glasses
- Clipboard & Pen (if applicable)
- Additional event-specific information (Obtain from Volunteer Coordinator / Program Delivery Partner)

## Equitable Award Distribution (*Spread the Wealth*)

The Judge Advisor's responsibility is to work with the judges to ensure proper and equitable distribution of awards.

- **It is important for the deserving teams be rewarded, as the credibility of the competition is on the line.** There may be situations where teams with outstanding robots should win both judged and field awards. Do

not allow the possibility of a team winning the event to affect a decision on a judged award (i.e. do not spread the wealth between judged awards and field awards).

- *FIRST* believes there are benefits to maximizing the distribution of awards among the competitors. The intent of *FIRST* is to encourage and motivate students and mentors. Awarding multiple awards to a team does not support this philosophy.
- Judge Advisors should explain the “spread the wealth” policy to the judges.
- **Do not** award the same team more than 1 judged award at a single event.

*Note: The “spread the wealth” philosophy is for within events, not between events. That is, judges should not use the fact that a team won award X at an earlier event to exclude them from award X at the current event. A team may be the best choice for award X at both events. (This excludes, of course, the Cultural Awards that can only be won once per level of competition - FIRST Impact Award, Rookie All-Star, and Engineering Inspiration).*

## Scheduling Interviews for *FIRST* Impact Award & Dean’s List Award

Judge Advisors will be responsible for randomly assigning teams to time slots for these awards. Interviews may only be set during times that Pits are open. Please follow this procedure at each event to maintain consistency.

1. Pre-event – The JA should review how many FIA & DL interviews they have at their event. The number of interviews will be available after the Judging Portals open (see [FIRST Impact Award & Dean’s List Award Portals](#)). JAs may also use historical information to plan ahead for this if they know how many team submissions were at the event last year. If the event has too many interviews that cannot be completed during the scheduled time, JAs may consider one of the following options:
    - o **Running interviews during practice day (regionals only)** – Please contact your Program Delivery Partner and/or Event Manager to confirm you have access to the room(s). The JA should also confirm the judges can be present for the extra day. If you use this method, the JA **must** email the teams before the event to let them know some interviews will be done on practice day, so teams ensure the correct students are there.
- As an option, Judge Advisors can consider doing these interviews on practice day even if they do not have too many interviews to aid with scheduling and number of judges.
- o **Running two interview rooms for the award** – this should be done only if you have enough judges to allow for this method and have the space. Please contact your Program Delivery Partner and/or Event Manager to confirm you can use this method. Please note that if using this method the 2 panels will only see half the teams and you are not allowed to re-interview any team or student.
  - o If either of these options do not work or you have questions, please contact one of our Global Judge Advisors for assistance.
    2. Pre-event - The Judge Advisor should set the interview time slots, so the judges have additional deliberation time after each interview.

### Notes:

- We recommend that FIA time slots are set for 30 minutes to allow time for the judges to provide feedback for each team and also allows flexibility for breaks when they need one. JAs may choose to make modifications to the timing as needed for their event. We also recommend that FIA judges meet before interviews begin (e.g. during breakfast) to review submissions together and compare questions. Use this [FIA Interview Time Slots template](#) when creating your schedule.
  - We recommend DL Time Slots are set for 20-minute cycles. Consider adding breaks if needed. Use the [DL Interview Time Slot Templates](#) when creating your schedule.
  - Following our recommendations allows the time needed for any teams that may need a translator/interpreter and time for judges to discuss after the interview but you may do shorter cycles if needed.
3. Pre-event - The JA creates time slots for all eligible teams at the event. Interviews may only be scheduled during hours that the pits are open. Teams are randomly assigned to time slots.

- o JAs should look at the [Method for Generating a Randomized List](#) for best practices. The JA will not schedule a DL and FIA interview for the same team during the same slot in case the DL nominee is also a *FIRST* Impact Award presenter.
- o **Don't publish the schedule before the event begins**
- 4. The Judge Advisor or Judge Advisor Assistant provides the sheet for teams at Pit Administration.
- 5. Pit Administration announces that the interview times have been posted. "The following teams have been assigned interviews for *FIRST* Impact/Dean's List Award (list off team numbers). Please come to Pit Admin to see what time the team/student is assigned."
- 6. Teams can see which time slot they have been given. Teams/students can let Pit Admin know if they do not want to interview.
- 7. Some teams/students may ask to change their time slot. In order to do so, the team/student must find another team/student that is willing to switch with them. Both teams will then come to Pit Admin who can approve the change and Pit Admin **must** alert the JA or JAA.
  - o One option JAs can use, is this optional [Interview Change form](#) to keep documentation of switches.

## Dean's List Award & *FIRST* Impact Award Meeting Best Practice

We encourage Judge Advisors to set up informal sessions with teams who are interviewing for the Dean's List Award and *FIRST* Impact Award. These informal sessions are optional but are a great way to show teams where interview rooms are, introduce the judges, and help make the experience less stressful for students. It's also a great way to explain the process for interviews and allow students to ask questions about the process if they have any. Please contact your Program Delivery Partner and/or Event Manager to work through when the best time to hold these would be and to communicate this out to teams.

Please remember that for many students, this may be their first interview, and they may be feeling anxious. To help break the ice at the beginning of an interview, you can do things like:

- Introduce yourself
- Ask how their day is going or how they are
- Tell a fun fact
- Explain what they can expect during the interview

## Award Entry System (AES)

[Award Entry System](#) is a system that JAs use at events to enter award winners and scripts. It also helps ensure all judging rules are enforced as the system will not allow ineligible teams to be submitted. AES can only be accessed during the week of the event. The code for accessing will be emailed to the Judge Advisor 2 days prior to the event. See the User Guide (coming soon) for more details on use.

Judge Advisors are asked to prepare a local copy of the award scripts and then enter award winners and scripts from the judge room into the Award Entry System. JAs can use the Award Script document provided by *FIRST* to type their award scripts into as a backup copy. Judge Advisors will need a laptop (not provided by *FIRST*) with access to the internet. If your venue typically does not have internet, please talk with your Program Delivery Partner (PDP) in advance or with your *FIRST* Technical Advisor (FTA)/ Event Manager on site who may offer ways to get access to the internet. The local copy ensures there is a backup available.

The deadline for everything to be entered into AES varies but is typically 30-45 minutes after playoffs begin. Please check with your Event Manager on site to finalize the exact time.

Award Scripts entered into AES appear online for teams to access after the event. We highly recommend that all events enter award scripts, so teams and PDPs have access after the event. The system does support other languages but only the script written by the judges will appear in another language. We still recommend that those using another language enter the award script into the script template that has been translated.



Judge Advisors are able to print the script in AES after successfully submitting the information. Judge Advisors should work with the Event Manager to establish a plan for printing the script. If the event does not have a printer in the judge room, the script can be downloaded as a pdf and emailed to the Event Manager to print.

**Tip!** Judge Advisors can view the eligibility report prior to receiving the code if desired. However, Judge Advisors should re-check the report at the start of the event.

To access the report, use this url (<https://frc-events.firstinspires.org/awardentrysystem/eligibility/YYYY>) and replace the YYYY with your event's Event Code. Ex. <https://frc-events.firstinspires.org/awardentrysystem/eligibility/BCVI>. If you are unsure of your event code visit [FRC-Events](#) to locate the event code for your event.

## Award Scripts

Assign judges to start the award write-ups as soon as an award is finalized. The best advocate for the winning team during deliberations should write the script since they will know the most details. If they are reluctant to draft the script, make sure they stay available to consult with the judge who will be drafting the script to ensure relevance and accuracy of the information.

Scripts should be two or three short sentences to describe the distinctive characteristics that best qualify a team for an award. It is important for a script to concisely convey the reasons the winner was chosen. Read the award scripts out loud to ensure the words will flow smoothly when spoken by the Emcee. Avoid too many poems or scripts that are “too cutesy”. Proofread all the scripts. Please refer to [Appendix B: Example Scripts](#) for best practices on how to write a script. **DO NOT** let the judges responsible for drafting each script leave the room until you have approved it as the JA.

## District Championship (DCMP) Events

Judge Advisors who are managing a District Championship Event should read this section to make sure they understand the differences between managing a District event and a District Championship Event.

### DCMP Award Eligibility

All teams attending the District Championship event are eligible to win any award, with the following exceptions:

- Only teams that have won the *FIRST* Impact Award at a District event are judged for the *FIRST* Impact Award at the District Championship event
- Only teams that have won Engineering Inspiration at a District event are judged for Engineering Inspiration at the District Championship Event
- Only teams that have won Rookie All Star at a District event are judged for Rookie All Star at the District Championship event

Please note that teams that qualify for the District Championship via cultural awards (FIA, EI, RAS) but are restricted to attending due to a religious reason should be offered a remote interview. Similarly, this is allowed for Dean's List as well.

### Number of Awards at DCMPs

Many Districts award more than 1 of each of the Cultural Awards (FIA, EI, RAS) & Dean's List. JAs need to confirm with the District Leadership the number of these awards being presented at their District Championship Event. These numbers can also be found on the [Championship Eligibility Criteria webpage](#).

### Judging Engineering Inspiration (EI) and Rookie All Star (RAS) Awards at DCMPs

Teams that win Engineering Inspiration and Rookie All Star during the season are the only teams eligible to be judged for these awards at the District Championship Event. Winning these awards during the season, however, does not qualify a team to compete with their robot at the District Championship Event. If a team qualifies to compete for either EI or RAS, but their robot does not, and they choose to not attend the event, they may elect to be interviewed via teleconference or video chat. Teams who elect to be judged remotely must be coordinated by the JA and do not impact how in-person judging should occur. Interviews may be conducted by phone or video



conference, as long as at least 2 adults are participating with the students. This interview does not need to take place concurrently with the event, but if not in advance, it must happen beforehand. Every team interviewed must have a fair opportunity for selection.

District Championships vary in space so there are two options for how Districts could judge in person teams for EI & RAS at the District Championship Event:

- **Option 1:** If there is not room for all teams to have a pit space, then all eligible teams must be interviewed outside of the pits (consider using the FIA & DL rooms on Day 2). The interview process for this award should follow the same method for FIA & DL – please review the [Scheduling Interviews for FIRST Impact Award & Dean's List Award section](#).
- **Option 2:** If all of the teams that are eligible for the EI / RAS Awards are given a pit space at the event, then teams should be interviewed in the pits. Please remember that only eligible teams (they must have won EI or RAS at a district event) should be interviewed for EI / RAS.

Regardless of which option is being used, District JAs should contact those teams to help share which process is being used in that District.

### Judging *FIRST* Dean's List Award at DCMs

Dean's List Award Finalists are announced at the District Championship event. District Championship Semi-finalists will re-interview at the District Championship event. Please refer to [Dean's List Award District Best Practices](#) earlier in this section for more details on the process for Districts.

The DL Judge Manager/ Judge Advisor will:

- recruit 2-3 judges to complete the DLA interviews at the District Championship
- contact the Lead Coach of each shortlisted DLA Semi-finalist to see if the student will be at the DCM
  - if any student is not able to attend in person, schedule an interview via phone or video chat prior to the event
- ensure that the DLA judges at the District Championship log into the judge portal and select the appropriate number of Finalists and answer all the questions in the portal
- prepare the DLA Finalist Certificates prior to the awards ceremony.
  - Be sure to use preferred name (if applicable) on the certificate

# Appendix A: Examples of JAA Responsibilities

---

As a reminder, Judge Advisor Assistants (JAA) are not required. Please talk with your Volunteer Coordinator if you would like to have this role. Here are some examples of what the JAA can help with.

- Assist with judge Training (if applicable):
  - Set out the judge shirts by gender/size on tables in room
  - Ensure there is sufficient seating for judges and guests
  - Check in judges as they arrive for the training.
  - After training, pack any remaining judge shirts to be returned to the judge room.
- Obtain judge room supplies - Reference page 4 of the [Event Planning Guide – Judge Section](#).
  - Contact the JA or Event Manager for missing items
- Obtain *FIRST*-supplied items
  - *FIRST* Supplied Items for Regional judges:
    - Game Season Pins, DLA Certificates, DLA Semi-finalist Buttons
  - *FIRST* Supplied Items for District judges:
    - Game Season Pins, DLA Award Certificates (for DCMP only), DLA Semi-finalist Buttons
- Setup the judge room
  - U-shaped table arrangement (recommended)
  - Sufficient seating for all judges
  - At each seat add: 1 ball point pen, 1 clipboard, 1 pair of safety glasses, 1 Game Season Pin (return extras to VC), 1 Match Schedule (obtain from Pit Admin), 1 Pit Map (obtain from Pit Admin), 1 Award Workbook, extra paper (or notebooks)
  - Ensure trash cans are available
  - Judge shirts and name badges are available
  - Laptop and printer (if applicable) are set-up and copy paper is available at a table
  - Breakfast/lunch set-up (if applicable) - Check with the Event Manager to see where the judges will be eating
- Setup the FIA & DLA Interview rooms
  - Confirm there is a table with enough chairs for the judges and the team
  - Ensure sign is outside door
  - Post schedule on wall once finalized
- Get a copy of the Match Schedule and make copies for each judge
- Go to Pit Admin and obtain the latest list of teams competing. Advise JA of any changes
- Ensure there are two chairs for the Match Observer judges set-up at the viewing area (with power, if needed)
- Verify schedule for Day One/Day Two with Event Manager (judges' breakfast time, opening ceremonies, judges' lunch, awards ceremony time) so that you may inform Judge Advisor.
- Ensure security of the judges' room when judges are not present. Ensure you have the ability to lock or unlock it as required.
- Assist Judge Advisor to keep judge panel on schedule and meet deadlines
- Provide clerical assistance, such as typing up award scripts on laptop
- Breakdown the judge room at the end of the competition, repack *FIRST* material (if applicable)
- Serve as a *FIRST* Impact Award/Dean's List Award Interview Room Runner: Ensure applicable teams/students have signed up for an interview time slot; are waiting in line to be interviewed; and retrieve teams/students from the Pits who are absent from the line before their time slot
- Perform other duties as assigned by Judge Advisor.

## Appendix B: Example Scripts

---

All teams that win an award will need a script written about them to be read during the Awards Ceremony. It is critical for Judges to take detailed notes during team interviews and to include the team number. The notes will be the foundation of the award script to be read out loud at the awards ceremony describing why a team received a particular award. Judges need to record enough detail during the interviews to accurately reflect the accomplishments in the award scripts. Award scripts are written for the positive qualities the team displays, rather than recognizing the hardships the team had to overcome. Here's a few tips to help when writing award scripts,

- Good scripts gush with imagery from different sources
  - Team name, school, mascot, location, team aspects, robot name, mantras, etc.
- Strong verbs, short sentences
- Use verbs to make your imagery powerful
- Avoid rhyming and tongue twisters and difficult to pronounce words or phrases
- Avoid cultural references

A best practice for writing scripts should be to use the Who, Why, Who model.

- First phrase sets up the script by providing a hint as to **who** was selected (but don't give it away just yet)
- Second phrase explains **why** they were selected (what did the team do to earn the award?)
- Third phrase repeats **who** won via resolution statement (the team ought to be celebrating by the time the emcee has finished this phrase)

Here's an example of using the Who, Why, Who model:

- Team Name: RoboDogs
- Theme: Dogs
- Award: Quality

<b>Who?</b> (setup)	These competitors have been unleashed on the competition.
<b>Why?</b>	Their robot is a true champion of versatility—scoring at every single level with ease.
<b>Who?</b> (resolution)	When it comes to building a machine that does it all with style, these competitors are top dog.

# Appendix C: FIRST Policies and Forms

---

## Consent & Release Form (C&R Form)

It is preferred that all volunteers complete their Consent & Release form electronically through the *FIRST* Dashboard. Work with the VC to ensure all judges have completed the form prior to the event.

Bring all signed Consent & Release forms to the Pit Admin Supervisor. For Regionals, Pit Admin ships these forms back to *FIRST*. For Districts, District leadership provides forms back to *FIRST* at the end of the season.

## Walk-On Event Volunteer Policy

Please work with your Volunteer Coordinator and/or Program Delivery Partner if you need any walk on volunteers.

## Report a Concern

Anyone can report a youth safety concern or medical incident to *FIRST* Headquarters using the [FIRST Reporting Portal](#) or by emailing [safety@firstinspires.org](mailto:safety@firstinspires.org):

1. **Youth Protection Concerns:** These can encompass a wide variety of issues impacting the safety of youth participants such as suspected abuse, bullying, harassment, discrimination, and/or questionable behavior or comments by adults.
2. **Medical Incidents:** All injuries or illnesses at a *FIRST* event, no matter how minor, must be reported. Incidents outside of events only need reporting if they involve *FIRST* materials, game design, or rules. For trip/slip/fall injuries, please include photos of the location, when possible, to help with documentation. Provide detailed information about the injury, immediate actions, and any follow-up care. Names can be removed for privacy, but key details like location and date/time are required. Accurate reporting helps improve safety.

Someone from *FIRST* will review youth protection reports and contact reporters, as appropriate/necessary. Anonymous Reports of Concern may be made on the *FIRST* Reporting Portal; however, the lack of contact information may impact our ability to follow up with the reporter and address the concern(s).

Remember that in the United States and Canada there are laws that require individuals working with youth to report known or suspected instances of child abuse and neglect. You can find a complete list for the USA and other contact information on the Child Welfare Gateway website [State Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Numbers](#). The contact information for reporting suspected child maltreatment in Canada can be found on the Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal under the [Provincial And Territorial Assistance](#) page.

*FIRST* requires all U.S. and Canadian teams to comply with youth protection policies and expects these standards to be applied internationally in accordance with [local laws and regulations](#).

**Note:** 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](mailto:customerservice@firstinspires.org).

## Additional Forms

- [FIRST Volunteer Handbook](#) - Comprehensive guide to the different ways people can volunteer with *FIRST*. Includes expectations, descriptions of training, policies, and other resources.
  - [FIRST Volunteer Code of Conduct](#) – This *FIRST* Code of Conduct lists some of the basic behaviors all participants should adhere to while participating in *FIRST* activities.
  - [FIRST Volunteer Rights and Responsibilities](#) – The section of the *FIRST* Volunteer Handbook that covers important items volunteers should be aware of.

JAs **must** destroy all paperwork (except C&R Forms which go to Pit Admin) at the end of the event, especially any materials that contain personal identifiable information (PII) or notes on teams for awards.

## Appendix D: 2026 Playoffs + Award Order

Match #	Blue	Red	Blue Time Gap (mins)	Red Time Gap (mins)	Winner moves to	Loser moves to
Upper Bracket - Round 1 - Match 1	8	1	-	-	Red - Match 7	Red - Match 5
Upper Bracket - Round 1 - Match 2	5	4	-	-	Blue - Match 7	Blue - Match 5
Upper Bracket - Round 1 - Match 3	7	2	-	-	Red - Match 8	Red - Match 6
Upper Bracket - Round 1 - Match 4	6	3	-	-	Blue - Match 8	Blue - Match 6
Lower Bracket - Round 2 - Match 5	L2	L1	0:24	0:33	Blue - Match 10	
Lower Bracket - Round 2 - Match 6	L4	L3	0:15	0:24	Blue - Match 9	
Upper Bracket - Round 2 - Match 7	W2	W1	0:42	0:51	Red - Match 11	Red - Match 9
Upper Bracket - Round 2 - Match 8	W4	W3	0:33	0:42	Blue - Match 11	Red - Match 10
Lower Bracket - Round 3 - Match 9	W6	L7	0:24	0:15	Blue - Match 12	
Lower Bracket - Round 3 - Match 10	W5	L8	0:42	0:15	Red - Match 12	
<b>6-minute Break</b>						
Upper Bracket - Round 4 - Match 11	W8	W7	0:27	0:36	Red - Match 14	Red - Match 13
Lower Bracket - Round 4 - Match 12	W9	W10	0:27	0:18	Blue - Match 13	
<b>15-minute Awards Break - Imagery, Gracious Professionalism, Team Spirit, Rising All Star</b>						
Lower Bracket - Round 5 - Match 13	W12	L11	0:18	0:27	Blue - Match 14	
<b>15-minute Awards Break - Autonomous, Creativity, Quality, Industrial Design,</b>						
Finals - Match 14	W13	W11	0:18	0:48	Match 15	Match 15
<b>15-minute Awards Break - Innovation in Control, Excellence in Engineering, Team Sustainability, Judges</b>						
Finals - Match 15	W13	W11	0:18	0:18	Match 16*	Match 16*
<b>15-minute Awards Break* - Rookie All Star, Dean's List, &amp; Engineering Inspiration**</b>						
Finals - Match 16*	W13*	W11*	0:18	0:18		
<b>Remaining Awards (if applicable), Finalist, Winner, FIRST Impact Award</b>						
* if required						
** Program Delivery Partners may choose to hold these awards until after all matches are complete.						