Judge Manual

Revision History		
Revision	Date	Description
1.0	10/16/2024	Initial 2024-2025 Release
1.1	10/31/2024	Corrected language about Think nominations, page 5 Made formatting edits

Overview

Roles Covered: Judge

Job Description

Judges meet with teams to learn about and celebrate the unique journey and accomplishments of each team and evaluate these against award requirements. Judges interact with students during the interview process and in the pits. As a group, Judges determine the teams that receive awards at events.

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

Time Commitment

A Judge should expect to spend 10-12 hours at a full-day event.
2-4 hours of pre-event training is required.

Attire

- Comfortable closed-toe, closed-heel shoes, much of the day will involve moving between the pit area and the deliberation room.
- ANSI Z87.1 certified safety glasses are required in the pit and competition areas.
- As one of the event leaders, comfortable professional wear is encouraged.
- Judges should not wear team affiliated clothing at the event.
- If team swag is present and Judges accept the swag, Judges must be willing to accept pins and other branding items from all teams.

Training and Certification

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

Volunteers must create an account on the *FIRST* dashboard and apply to the role. If you apply to an event role requiring training and certification, the 'Roles Missing Certification' section will appear on

your Volunteer Dashboard. Click on 'Review Outstanding Tasks,' then click the 'Resolve' button. This will take you directly to the training site. Alternately, you may also click on the 'Trainings/Certification' button on the top right of the screen. If you have applied for a role but have not received access to the training, please email FTCTrainingSupport@firstinspires.org. A separate confirmation of the role assignment will come later.

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

Roles and Responsibilities

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

A Judge is responsible for:

Responsibilities
Conduct team interviews
Conduct pit interviews
Review portfolios (when present)
Update Judging Summary Forms
Update Judging Feedback Forms
Watch competition matches (when applicable)
Within your panel, determine the top ranked teams for each judged award
As a group come to consensus with other Judges on the recipient of each award and finalists (if applicable)
Use interview notes, work with other Judges to create award scripts for top ranked and award-winning teams

Prerequisites for Judges
Judges must be at least 21 years old and post high school or equivalent. Volunteers over 18 years old and post-high school may request to be assigned to this role, and the request will be reviewed for consideration by *FIRST* Headquarters staff. Prior *FIRST* experience is not required but is preferred.

Philosophy of Judging
FIRST recognizes both on-field performance, and the characteristics that help *FIRST* achieve its mission to change the culture by inspiring young people. Competition awards are earned by teams for their ability to play the game, while judged awards celebrate teams for their off-field performance. Please review Section 6 of the Competition Manual to learn more about the award categories.

It is important that both Judges and students have a positive judging experience. The awards are a method *FIRST* uses to inspire students and help provide insight for their future endeavors. The goal of

judging is to recognize students for their achievements, help them celebrate their successes, and to cheer them on in their journey through the *FIRST* programs.

Modeling *Gracious Professionalism*

As a Judge, you serve in a visible role at an event. You will interview teams and listen to their stories, challenges, and accomplishments that took place throughout the season. Many students see judging interviews as a stressful time, publicly speaking to new people in an unfamiliar environment. Judges are there to put the team at ease by taking notes and asking questions that will allow teams to demonstrate how they have grown throughout the season.

Judges are role models who are professionals across many different industries outside of the *FIRST* setting. Judges are an important volunteer, are vital to the judging process and are frequently front and center. As such, your actions are very noticeable to teams, coaches, mentors, and parents. While Judges are responsible for determining awards, Judges must never publicly comment about a team's attributes, compare teams, or make comments that would be considered negative or condescending to a team.

Judges are responsible for celebrating the accomplishments of all teams, and while Judges may only be able to award a few teams, Judges act as a cheerleader to all teams in *FIRST* Tech Challenge. You should make sure to keep a professional demeanor in working with the entire Judge crew. A light-hearted, friendly personal style in the interview room and around the pits should help to keep the interactions with everyone, including the teams, friendly and cordial.

Before the Event

Pre-Event Training

Judges must complete the required reading in this section and pass a certification test before serving in this role.

Resources for training and certification:

Judge Pre-event Training List	
Requirement	**Resource**
Required	Complete the *FIRST* Data Protection and Privacy training in BlueVolt
Required	The Competition Manual - specifically • Section 6 - Awards
Required	Complete the Judges Certification test in BlueVolt
Required	Review the Award Terms and Definitions
Required	Review the Conflict-of-Interest Description
Required	Complete Conflict of Interest Form
Encouraged	Competition Manual – specifically • Section 4 - Advancement
Encouraged (New this season)	Complete Strategies for Inspiring Success for All Modules.
Encouraged	Attend the monthly Judging Calls
Encouraged	Review the Judging Questions Document

Judge Pre-event Training List	
Requirement	**Resource**
Optional	Watch the [game animation video](#) for a general understanding of the game for a general understanding of the game

Event Day

Report Time

The Event Director, Volunteer Coordinator or Judge Advisor will confirm the time you arrive, and the location you should arrive at, typically via email the week before the event. In most cases, you will need to be at the event when it opens for volunteers first thing in the morning, or at least 1 hour before judging interviews are scheduled to begin.

When you arrive onsite check-in with the volunteer check-in table, or the Volunteer Coordinator and then report to the Judge Advisor unless you have received different check-in instructions.

Set-up

Go to the judging deliberation room for a meeting which typically includes some day-of training. Declare any Conflict of Interest you might have, including teams you are associated with in any way.

As part of the introductory meeting, the Judge Advisor will provide resources for the formal interview such as:

Formal Interview Resources	
Panel Assignments	The Judge Advisor may consider several different factors when assigning a panel. One of the most common factors is ensuring each panel has at least one technical judge and one non-technical judge. The Judge Advisor may assign new judges to a panel with a Judge with prior experience.
List of Teams	The Judge Advisor will give a list of teams you will meet in the formal interview process. ***Remember:*** These teams are excited to meet you, and excited to tell you about themselves.
Short List of Questions	The Judge Advisor will provide a short list of required questions that you must ask each team. You may ask other questions once the required questions are asked. Judges will be provided with a list of additional sample questions.
Forms	The Judge Advisor will provide Judging Feedback Forms and Judging Summary Forms for each team in your panel.

In addition to the resources listed above the Judge Advisor may also provide writing utensils and any other resources that may be needed to complete formal interviews.

Formal Interviews

The first interaction Judges will have with teams is the formal interview, which in most cases occurs in the morning of the event. Each interview will last at least 10 minutes. Every team receives the same amount of time in their interview.

Each formal interview should follow the format in the table below. Teams have worked incredibly hard and could be very stressed or nervous about the event and the interview process. Remember to smile and be welcoming.

Formal Interviews	
Team Enters the Room	Give teams a minute to get set up while you introduce yourself, welcome them to the interview, collect their portfolio, if they have one, and ask them if they have a presentation.
5 Minute Presentation	Teams receive the opportunity to present, uninterrupted, for the first 5 minutes of their interview. If teams have a presentation, they receive 5 minutes to speak to you. If teams do not have a presentation, you can begin to ask questions immediately.
Q&A	After the presentation, you can ask them questions. Please ask the required questions provided by the Judge Advisor **Remember:** It is important that you do your best to put the teams at ease.
Review Portfolio and Complete Forms	After the interview, take a moment to make notes on the Judge Summary Sheet, review the portfolio, if one was provided, and complete the Judging Feedback Form. You will have 10 minutes to do this.

> Please do not ask teams about religion, politics, gender, disabilities, or how the students are doing in school. These topics have no bearing on any *FIRST* award criteria.

Judges should keep in mind that they can consider content that is relevant to the current season, and information that a team shares with them during their interview processes. This could include stories from previous seasons that a team shares to illustrate their growth.

If a Judge has knowledge about a team from previous events or previous seasons that is outside of what a team has shared during the event, the information is not relevant to the judging process and should not be a part of the judging discussion.

Initial Nominations

After formal interviews have concluded, report back to the deliberation room at the time provided by the Judge Advisor.

In the deliberation room, Judges should nominate teams who are strong contenders based on the award criteria. Judges do not nominate teams for the Inspire Award at this time. Teams should be nominated for every award that they meet the criteria for. A team may be nominated for multiple awards at this stage of the process. The Judge Advisor may place limits on the number of teams a Judging Panel can nominate for a given award.

Judges can nominate teams directly for the Think Award if they have a portfolio. Teams who have submitted a portfolio and have been nominated for a Team Attribute and a Machine, Creativity, and

Innovation Award will also be added to the Think Award category for consideration. Teams must meet all the criteria for the Think Award, but at this early stage, their portfolio will be considered.

After the initial nominations, the Judge Advisor will assign you to one or more awards panels. At this stage, your role is to gather more information about team accomplishments. Judges may be assigned to interview teams in their pit areas and/or watch team competition matches, and/or review portfolios.

Judges will be given a list of teams to be evaluated by the Judge Advisor. Please understand that some of the teams on your list will be directly related to the award panel you have been assigned to, and other teams will be teams that are not on an award list. Every team deserves a pit visit from the Judges.

Pit Interviews

Judges visiting teams in the pits will decide, with your award panel, on a series of questions to ask the teams you visit. It is important to perform pit interviews with groups of 2 or 3 Judges. It is important to interview every team on your list. The Judge Advisor will provide you with the match schedule and where possible, a pit map. The match schedule will help you determine when teams will likely be in their pit area. The pit map will help you locate the teams you would like to talk with.

Teams on your list may not always be nominated for awards. It is important that Judges visit every team at the event to recognize and celebrate the work the team has done. Interaction with Judges is a valuable part of the *FIRST* experience.

All teams will have the opportunity to participate in a pit interview, regardless of the number of nominations that they have received and regardless of their participation in a formal interview.

Match Observation

Some award panels may be asked to observe robot game matches to understand robot performance, and the contribution of their design, control, or innovative solution they have described. The robot's performance is not directly related to the win/loss record or their ranking in the robot competition. The match schedule will help Judges understand where and when teams are playing their matches.

Think Award Judging

The Think Award Judges review the portfolios of each team on the Think Award list and compare their contents to the criteria for the award. Think Award Judges may need to interview teams in their pit area to evaluate the encouraged criteria, if needed, to help them better understand the portfolio content.

Determining Inspire Award Candidates

The Judge Advisor will walk you through the process to determine Inspire Award candidates. Teams who are contenders for the Think Award, a Team Attributes award, and a Machine, Creativity and Innovation award will be added to the Inspire Award candidate list.

Final Deliberations

Once the pit interviews are completed, Judges return to the deliberation room, and the Judges will be asked to rank the teams using the award criteria and the results of the pit interviews, match observations, and where applicable, portfolio evaluations

The Judge Advisor will walk you through the final selections of the teams for each award that will be presented at the event.

Judges should keep in mind that they can consider content in the portfolio that is relevant to the current season, and information that a team shares with them during their interview processes. This could include stories from previous seasons that a team shares to illustrate their growth. If a Judge has knowledge about a team from previous events or previous seasons that is outside of what a team has shared during the event, the information is not relevant to the judging process and should not be a part of the judging discussion.

> During the final deliberation process, it is good practice to advocate graciously and compromise readily.

Judges Choice Award

During the interview process, you may encounter a team that has special qualities that fall outside of the award criteria but are inspiring and worthy of celebration. If your Event Director has arranged for Judges Choice awards, your Judge Advisor will ask you to nominate teams in that category.

Recognition Principles

When determining which teams will be recognized with awards, your Judge Advisor will walk you through listing them. Judges will work together to determine a ranking order for each team in each award category, except the Inspire Award.

After teams are ranked, the Judge Advisor will walk you through helping to decide which team will be recognized as the Inspire Award winner. That team will be removed from every other award list. Depending upon the event size, the Judge Advisor may move to the Think Award decision or may ask you to determine an Inspire Award 2nd place team. This process will follow the order outlined in section 4 of the Competition Manual. The Judge Advisor will move down the list of teams, in the order they would advance, determine an award winner for each category, and then remove that team from all other award categories. The goal is to identify fine examples of teams that meet the award guidelines, and to celebrate and inspire as many teams at the event as possible.

Teams should not be named as the winner or as a finalist for more than one judged award. Teams may receive a competition award and a judged award.

The Award Script

Teams are recognized at the playoffs and awards ceremony. This is likely to be held in between the double elimination matches at the end of the day. Award scripts are written for the team's positive qualities and do not recognize the hardships a team may have overcome. The message to the teams and the audience about each award winner should be an uplifting one.

Judges write the award scripts. It can be helpful to read them aloud to make sure they are easy to read by the Emcee and should include the key reason the team has received the award.

There is a standard format for the award script. A good award script is usually three sentences.

1. Sentence one could apply to many teams but includes a subtle hint.
2. Sentence two has a hint that the winning team might understand.
3. Sentence three has a bigger hint, leaving the team somewhat sure who it is, but is not 100% positive.
4. The last sentence is "And the award goes to..."

Judges may use AI to help write their award script, and the script should offer credit to AI for helping to write the script.

Team Interaction and Support

When interacting with teams please always consider the team's perspective. The teams have put significant time and effort into preparing for this event and may be feeling very stressed about everything working out as they have planned. **Today is a very big deal for the team and we are here to help!**

While it is our job to help guide the teams to a successful event, it is their responsibility to follow the rules and be on time for judging and matches.

If you feel there is an issue with an individual or individuals from a team that warrants specific intervention beyond just a kind reminder, please ensure the correct stakeholders for the team are aware. Here is a generally acceptable process when working with a student or team who you need to change their behavior:

The ABCs of Managing Team Behaviors	
Ask for an Adult	Do not directly reprimand a student one-on-one without an adult from their team present. Ask the student to bring an adult who is responsible for the team to meet you, before moving forward with any discussion about the concerns at hand.
Be aware of the Environment	Is the environment conducive for the feedback you are about to give? Is it loud in the area where you are? Are there other teams around that may hear the reprimand? Moving the conversation to a quieter, more private space as needed can be helpful.
(Offer a) Clear Explanation	Explain the concern to the team and offer clear examples of the behavior that is concerning.
Discuss any Questions	Offer the opportunity for students and adults to ask clarifying questions
Explain Next Steps	Outline with the students and adults what the next steps are if the issue is not corrected. Certain behaviors may include the risk of yellow cards

> **Note**: the only person at an event who can give an official warning or issue a yellow/red card is the Head Referee. Please refer these more severe issues to the Head Referee and notify the Program Delivery Partner.

In your role as a Judge, you should not directly consider any negative feedback about any teams from volunteers or other teams because it is not possible to know all the contributing factors around such a complaint or observation. That information will be handled by the Judge Advisor (JA) working with the Event Director and *FIRST* HQ as needed. If there are issues which are repeated or egregious follow the Non-Medical Incident Reporting process and inform the Program Delivery Partner.

Teams may only be completely disqualified from awards consideration for very rare egregious actions and only with approval from *FIRST* HQ. The Event Director and/or JA should call the on-call number to discuss the issue.

Safety

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

Prioritize working with teams to help identify and correct potential safety issues in the area. Please review the section about <u>Team Interaction and Support</u> for the best ways to work with teams on making changes.

Safety Glasses and Closed Toe Shoes

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

End of the Day

At the end of the day, you will gather all your notes and give them to the Judge Advisor for secure disposal. Please do not discuss the judging deliberation process with teams or other volunteers.
You will attend the playoffs and awards ceremony, either as a participant or as an observer. After the event is over, you can celebrate the positive impact you made on the students you interacted with.

Important Tools

Public Schedule

You will receive the public schedule from the Volunteer Coordinator or the Judge Advisor. You will also be provided with the times you must report back to the deliberation room, and the time that all awards must be decided. This schedule will have a high-level overview of all the activities for the event. It is important that everyone at the event does their best to stay true to the public schedule so that teams and volunteers who have planned their day around these times have a good experience.

Figure 1: Sample Public Schedule for a Typical FIRST Tech Challenge Event

Time	Agenda
7:15am	Doors Open for Volunteers
8:00am	Doors Open for Teams
8:30am	Judging & Inspection Commences
10:35am	Inspection Deadline
10:40am	Opening Ceremony & Driver's Meeting
11:00am	Qualification Matches Commence
12:00am	Lunch Time
12:30pm	Qualification Matches Resume
3:15pm	Alliance Selection
3:45pm	Elimination Matches
5:30pm	Closing Ceremony, Awards and Advancement Announcement

On occasion things that happen out of the event's control may impact the schedule. In these cases, your Judge Advisor will provide you with updates to the agenda.

Event Layout/Map

The Program Delivery Partner and Event Director should publish a map of the venue before the event. In some cases, details on the map might not be available until the day of the event.
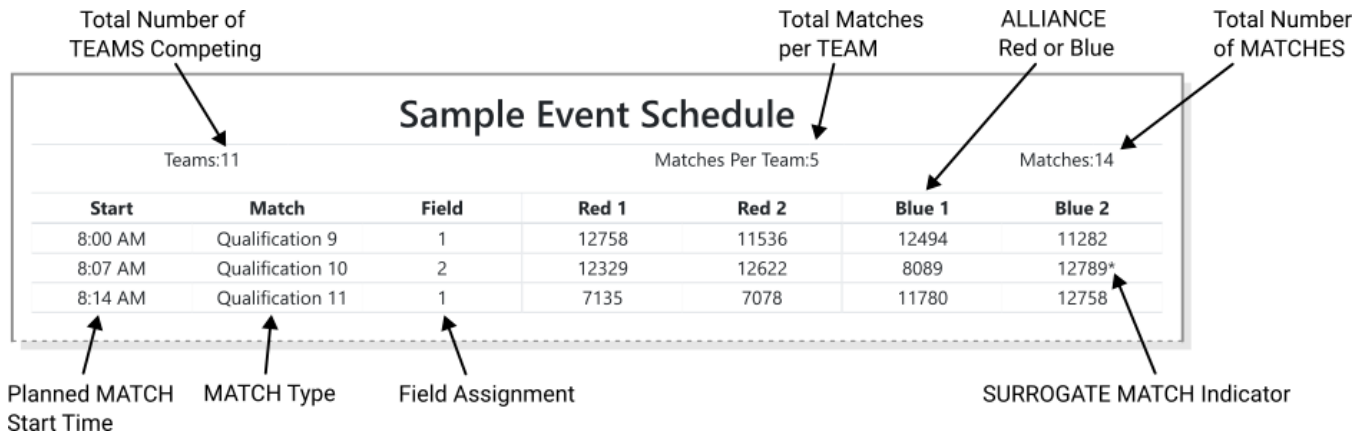The event layout map should detail the following:

- Load-In Path
- Parking for personal vehicles and busses
- Team Check-in
- Volunteer Check-in
- Competition Area
- Pit Area (may include the `Pit Map`)
- Judging Room Locations (if applicable)
- Safety Details as available (emergency exits, AED, shelter in place locations)

Judging Schedule

The judging schedule will be provided by the Volunteer Coordinator or the Judge Advisor.

Match Schedule

The match list will be generated the day of the event after the teams have been confirmed. This schedule will list which teams will play in which Alliance (Red or Blue) and it will also list a match start time see Figure 2. Some events will have more than one competition field and/or division, and each division will have its own schedule. The match list will help you to know when teams are most likely to be in their pit area or on the competition field, which will help you with pit interviews.

Figure 2: Example Match Schedule

Pit Map

Pit maps are typically provided by the Volunteer Coordinator or the Judge Advisor. Having a map of where each team is in the pit is key, as teams, parents, Judges, or Queuers might need to locate a specific team. Below are two sample pit maps in Figure 3 and Figure 4:
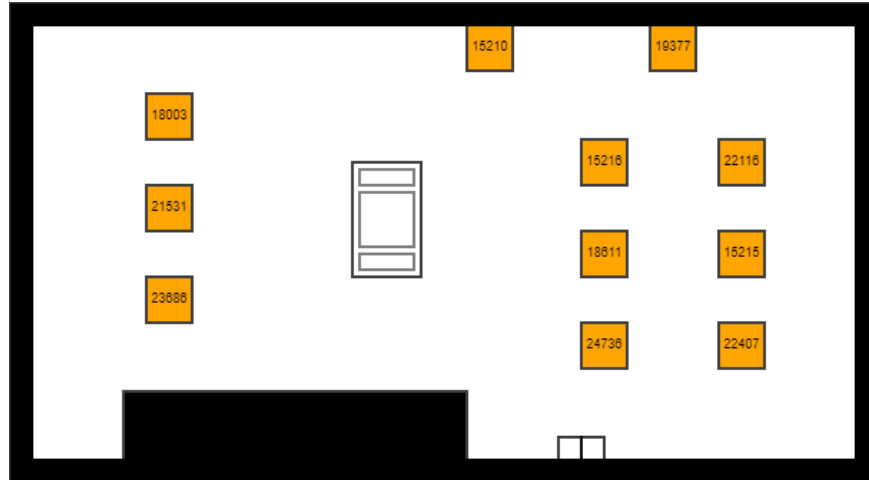

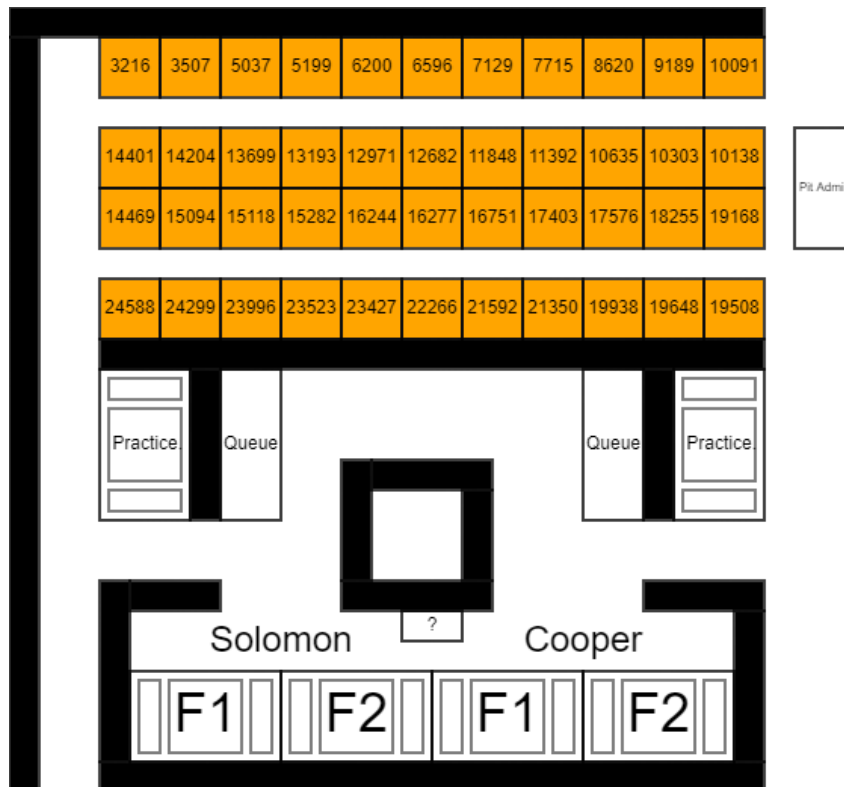*Figure 3:Example Pit Map for a small12-team Qualifier Event*

Figure 4: Example Pit Map for a Typical Regional Championship Event

Useful Links and Information

Program Resources

FIRST Tech Challenge Website

Event Search

Game and Season Resources

FIRST Tech Challenge Blog

Volunteer Resources

Team Email Blasts

Feedback

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