

Staffing a *FIRST* Robotics Competition Event

Overview

Staffing a *FIRST* Robotics Competition event is a joint effort between the Planning Committee, the Program Delivery Partner, the Volunteer Coordinator, and *FIRST* Headquarters. The growth in *FIRST* teams and events continues to far outpace the growth in *FIRST* staff. *FIRST* competitions rely on volunteers to execute successful events. Only a small number of *FIRST* staff are available to attend competitions, with priority given to new events.

The Volunteer Coordinator (VC)

The Volunteer Coordinator (VC) is the primary individual responsible for staffing a *FIRST* Robotics Competition event. Running a successful event is an incredibly challenging but fun experience, and properly staffing an event is the key to its success. For full details of the role, check out the [Volunteer Coordinator role description](#).

Volunteer Coordinators are typically recruited by the Program Delivery Partner (PDP) or a Senior Volunteer Coordinator. The PDP is involved in all aspects of the event and may provide ongoing guidance and support to the Volunteer Coordinator. Volunteer Coordinators should work closely with the PDP before and during the event. They can provide guidance on volunteer recruitment and may provide contacts or leads.

The Volunteer Coordinator is:

- A recruiter of event volunteers.
- Often a member of the Planning Committee who will work with other members of the Planning Committee to recruit volunteers from local companies, organizations, and universities.
- A partner to the event management company, such as Show Ready Events or a hired/volunteer event manager before and/or during the event.
 - Regional VCs should work with their PDP on pre-event planning duties. At the event itself, regional Volunteer Coordinators are expected to work closely with the event managers.
 - District VCs can work directly with the Event Manager pre-event if both parties agree.
- The primary contact for all volunteers prior to the event and while on-site. Judge advisors are also a primary contact for volunteer judges.
- A voice of *FIRST*. The model of *Gracious Professionalism*® and *Coopertition*®.

Multiple Volunteer Coordinators

FIRST requires one Volunteer Coordinator per event but having more than one VC may be helpful (max of 2 per event). There are many components to the VC role and having more than one person to share responsibilities and management of the event, especially on-site, can be beneficial. Last minute changes and emergencies do happen, and having a second VC capable of stepping in will ensure the success of the event. It is important that all communication with volunteers include the names of both the Volunteer Coordinators for the event to keep everyone in the loop.

Volunteer Coordinators may divide the tasks and/or they may work on some tasks together. Communication between both Volunteer Coordinators is key. If there is more than one VC, the division of duties and responsibilities should be clearly defined.

Examples of split duties:

- One person can maintain volunteer assignments in the VMS.



- One person can be responsible for recruiting volunteers & the other to assign and confirm volunteers.
- One person is responsible for assigning certain roles & the other responsible for the remaining roles.
- One person manages the VMS side (assigning & communicating with volunteers) & the other VC manages more of the administrative side (buying supplies, ordering apparel, etc.)
- Volunteer Coordinators may develop the content for the email notes sent to the volunteers together, but they may wish to split other responsibilities.

Volunteer Roles

Please refer to the [FIRST Robotics Competition Event Volunteer Positions](#) page for complete descriptions of each position. This page also highlights which roles are Key Volunteer Roles.

Staying Flexible with Volunteer Recruitment

Every year, *FIRST* will inform Volunteer Coordinators of the number of volunteers to recruit for each position. It is not uncommon for new volunteer positions to be created at the beginning of a new season or for the number of volunteers needed in certain positions to fluctuate throughout the season. We often get feedback from Volunteer Coordinators after Week One events that they recommend a higher or lower number of volunteers for certain positions. *FIRST* would then inform all Volunteer Coordinators of this increase/decrease. This often happens with larger groups of volunteers, such as Robot Inspectors and Field Resetters. We ask that our VCs remain flexible and adjust accordingly as this occurs. Remember the increase in volunteers for the position is to help ensure a successful event.

Note – Events may need a different number of volunteers for certain roles. Please review the Volunteer Roles Cheat Sheet (found within the FRC SharePoint Site) and check with your Program Delivery Partner and/or Planning Committee for more information.

Starting Point

An excellent starting point is to review the Volunteer Roles Cheat Sheet (found within the FRC SharePoint Site). This document shares what roles are required, which are optional, and other important current season information. Please note that these numbers are starting points and events may need to increase the number of volunteers in specific roles to meet the needs of each event. For instance, you may need more Safety Attendants, or you may need more Robot Inspectors. Talk with your planning Committee as well as other key volunteers to establish numbers for your event.

Events may also choose to add custom volunteers to their event dependent on event specific needs. More information on how to create custom roles for volunteers can be found in the [VMS User Guide \(pages 17-18\)](#).

Key Volunteer Recruitment

Key Volunteer Positions require *FIRST* experience, specialized skills, training, and sometimes the ability to pass a test to become certified. Recruit at least one, if not two trainee/alternate volunteers for each key position to ensure position coverage and event sustainability; the trainee/alternate will work with the key volunteer in an apprentice role.

In some cases, it may be necessary to recruit a Key Volunteer who is not local to the event. This is only feasible when a volunteer can cover their own travel and accommodation expenses, or the event is able to underwrite their expenses.



Key volunteers are recruited before any other volunteer. This is because key volunteers require specialized training and/or testing. *FIRST* will conduct key volunteer specialized pre-event training and the individuals need to be identified before training can begin. In addition, some key volunteers have required testing and need time to prepare for and pass the certification.

Volunteer Coordinators do not need to recruit Judge Advisors (recruited directly by the PDP) or *FIRST* Technical Advisors (FTAs - recruited directly by *FIRST* for Regionals or the PDP for Districts).

Note: In some regions, the Program Delivery Partners (PDP) or Lead/Senior Volunteer Coordinators may manage the effort to secure commitments from key volunteers for the upcoming season. We highly recommend working with your PDP and/or Lead/Senior Volunteer Coordinator with respect to key volunteer assignments before formalizing them in the VMS and/or notifying volunteers of their assignments.

Key Volunteer Assignments

It is important to assign key volunteers as early as possible in the season. For some key volunteers, training begins in January and others may begin in early February. It is imperative that key volunteers are recruited in a timely manner and that they attend training sessions or listen to the recordings. Key volunteer recruitment is a top priority for the Volunteer Coordinator position.

- Lead Robot Inspectors are typically due to *FIRST* by November 1st.
- Head Referees are typically due to *FIRST* by December 1st.
- VCs should ensure that all remaining key volunteers are assigned in VMS by January 31st.
- Contact *FIRST* if you are having difficulty recruiting a key volunteer.

FIRST will pull weekly reports during the competition season to monitor key volunteer recruitment for all *FIRST* Robotics Competition events. *FIRST* will contact events who do not have a volunteer assigned in a key volunteer role at the time the report is pulled.

FIRST Volunteer Registration

Volunteer Registration is the system volunteers use to apply to volunteer at an event. Individuals interested in volunteering are directed to Volunteer Registration via the [FIRST Dashboard](#). They create a personal profile that includes their contact information and sign up at event(s) and indicate their interest in specific event positions.

FIRST Volunteer Management System (VMS)

The Volunteer Coordinator (VC), Judge Advisor (JA), *FIRST* Program Delivery Partner, and *FIRST* Headquarter staff have access to information about volunteers that have applied to their event through the Volunteer Management System (VMS). Access to VMS is granted by *FIRST* Headquarters. The Volunteer Coordinator contacts the individuals that applied to the event to review opportunities and determine position assignment based on event needs, volunteer preferences, and volunteer experience. The VC & JA must work together to establish who is responsible for judge recruitment, assignment, and communication tasks. Both the JA and the VC have access to the VMS, so it is crucial that it is clearly decided who is completing which task by communicating with your Judge Advisor.

The [Volunteer Management System \(VMS\)](#) is an online tool used to assign and manage volunteers. All Volunteer Coordinators are required to use VMS to assign volunteers. For help on how to use VMS, go to the [VMS User Guide](#). Contact [Volunteer Systems](#) for any questions or assistance needed.

Volunteer Training

Volunteer Training

Training is essential for volunteers to perform their responsibilities, which contributes to the success of an event. The Volunteer Coordinator, with support from the Event Planning Committee, Program Delivery Partner/Regional Director and event Key Volunteers, has primary responsibility for planning and conducting training for General Event Volunteers.

FIRST headquarters provides training for Key Volunteers. Training information for these volunteers will be sent directly to the volunteers and also shared with the Volunteer Coordinators when available.

Volunteer Orientation

Some Events may choose to hold a Volunteer Orientation the night prior to the start of the event but many choose to send out information via email. Volunteer Coordinators have access to a template they can use and edit for their event that has basic info about *FIRST* and the event.

If they host an in-person meeting, it will provide volunteers with an event orientation and general event volunteer training may be conducted. Various volunteer forms can be completed and collected during the meeting. The Volunteer Coordinator in collaboration with the Event Manager and members of the Event Planning Committee will plan and conduct this meeting.

Volunteer Guidelines and Requirements

The *FIRST* website includes a wealth of information regarding *FIRST* programs and volunteering. The [Volunteer Handbook](#) is a comprehensive guide to the different ways people can volunteer with *FIRST* and includes expectations, descriptions of trainings, policies, and other resources.