

Judges

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.

New judges will be given one *FIRST* judge polo to wear during the competition. Veteran judges are asked to wear their shirt from the previous year. Judge attire is casual, and comfortable closed toed shoes are a must! Judges do a lot of walking between the playing field, pit area, and the judge room and some areas require close toed shoes.

The Judge Advisor Assistant (JAA) Role

The Judge Advisor Assistant is an optional role. Ask the Judge Advisor if they want a Judge Advisor Assistant for the event. Many JAs either do not need or want a volunteer in this role or have one they want to serve in this 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 key vols. The JAA will divide their time between keeping the judge room organized and gathering and delivering info between teams and judges. The Judge Advisor Assistant is **not** a judge and does not provide input on decisions made in the judges' room nor should the Judge Advisor Assistant wear a judge polo. Instead, the Judge Advisor Assistant will be issued a volunteer t-shirt at the event, and their badge will say, "Judge Advisor Assistant".

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. You can read the full [Judge Advisor Assistant role description](#) online.

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 (PDP) 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 events 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.

Multiple Judge Advisors Coordinators

FIRST requires one Judge Advisor per event but having more than one JA may be helpful (max of 2 per event). There are many components to the JA 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 JA 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 JAs for the event to keep everyone in the loop.

JAs may divide the tasks and/or they may work on some tasks together. Communication between both is key. Additionally, the division of duties and responsibilities should be clearly defined.

Judge Advisor Submissions

FIRST will solicit Judge Advisor submissions from the Program Deliver Partner in the early fall. All new *FIRST* Judge Advisors must have three (3) years' experience judging for *FIRST* Robotics Competition. Submission of a Judge Advisor by the Planning Committee does not automatically guarantee the individual will be the local Judge Advisor. Once nominated, the individual must be approved by *FIRST*, including the Chief Judge Advisors. Once approved the candidate will be contacted and assigned by *FIRST*.

The PDP is urged to contact *FIRST* for assistance if they are having trouble recruiting a Judge Advisor for a new event. *FIRST* may be able to place a veteran Judge Advisor at a new event to help train a local Judge Advisor Trainee who will serve as the Judge Advisor the following year. The Planning Committee is responsible for recruiting a Judge Advisor Trainee in this case and ensuring that this person adheres to all guidelines and standards as set by *FIRST*.

Note: *FIRST* asks that the Planning Committees do not make any commitments to the Judge Advisor as all Judge Advisors must be approved by *FIRST*.

JA Training

All Judge Advisors are required to participate in training. The training is available remotely and on demand. It includes videos, the judge manual, a JA Certification, and more. All Judge Advisors must pass the JA Certification in order to remain eligible.

Judge Recruitment

The Judge Advisor (JA), Volunteer Coordinator (VC), and/or PDP, may be responsible for recruiting judges. Discuss who is responsible for judge recruitment/assignment before acting. 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.

If the VC is aware of any individuals who are qualified to serve as a judge, please submit names and information to the PDP and Judge Advisor. Once JAs are assigned (by mid-October), the judge recruitment process begins by confirming the judges can “save the event dates” in their calendars. After the judges are recruited (i.e., verbally committed to attending) *FIRST* suggests the following occur:

- The VC and/or JA establishes contact with the judges via email and provides instruction on how to register in Volunteer Registration and provides any assistance needed.
- Once the judge registers in Volunteer Registration and passes screening, the VC and/or JA assigns the judges in the VMS.
- The JA should then assume communication and management for the judges (e.g., distributing the Judge Manual, communicating dates/times, and following up on training and certifications).
- The VC and JA must decide where they want judges to check-in upon arrival at the event. This can be through the general volunteer registration area, or it can be at a specific site for judges. This information needs to be communicated to the judges directly by the VC and/or JA.
- Once the judges are on-site at the event, the JA is responsible for supervising and managing the judges.

Number of Judges Needed

The ideal team to judge ratio for an event is approximately 2:1, 2 teams for every 1 judge (see Figure 1: Ideal Judge Recruitment Matrix). The judge panel should reflect a good balance of veteran and first time (rookie) judges; 50/50 is ideal. The veteran judges serve as mentors for the rookie judges during the event and guide them through the intense judging process. If you are struggling to recruit enough judges, please work with the JA and VC to discuss alternate strategies.

FIRST understands that many events use the judge role to reward sponsors or as an incentive to recruit new sponsors. Please check with the Event Manager to be sure your judge space can accommodate additional judges and be aware that any additional expenses above the allocation for shirts must be approved by the PDP and will be charged to the event.

Figure 1: Ideal Judge Recruitment Matrix

Event Capacity (# of Teams)	Pit Interview Judges	* Match Observers	** FIA and DL Judges	Minimum Judges needed	# of Fields in Play
24	12	2	6	18	1
28	14	2	6	18	1
32	16	2	6	22	1
36	18	2	6	24	1
40	20	2	6	26	1
44	22	2	6	28	1

48	24	2	6	30	1
52	26	2	6	32	1
56	28	2	6	34	1
60	30	2	6	36	1

* Match Observers: We recommend at least 2.

** FIRST Impact Award (FIA) Judges & Dean’s List (DL) Award Judges: Minimum of 2 but 3 recommended

Where to find Judges:

Some potential pools of individuals that may be interested in the Judge role:

- Current & future sponsors – a great way to reward and engage sponsors!
- CEO’s and other senior level employees
- Coworkers
- Retired engineers
- Local colleges, teachers, school board members
- Professional Societies or Conferences: IEEE, SWE, etc.
- Social Organizations – i.e. Rotary, Elks Lodge, Toast Masters, etc.
- Veteran Judges - may have recommendations and suggestions on other potential Judges.
- Use these people sparingly - to avoid perceived conflicts of interest
 - Board Members + Event Planning Committee Members
 - Current Team Mentors
 - Recent *FIRST* Alumni

Note: Any judge who has an association with a participating team at the event must sign the [Conflict of Interest Form](#).

Timing of Judge Recruitment

FIRST recommends beginning to recruit judges in September (6 months in advance of the event). A final judge panel should be in place by no later than 6 weeks prior to the event. Early recruitment will get the dates booked on the judges’ calendars and allow adequate time for judges to access Volunteer Registration for updating of their volunteer information and to pass volunteer screening.

Note: Judges recruited after the Program Book deadline for submissions, will NOT have their name listed in the book.

Judge Training

Judge training is critical for volunteers each season. These short, **required** training courses will update you on changes in the award process and game. There is a required judge training for each of the following:

- General Judge Training
- Dean’s List Award Judge Training
- *FIRST* Impact Award Judge Training

As we know many judges, serve in the role year-after-year, we have updated the training to multiple short videos which will be required for all judges, and one longer video (~15 minutes) with all of the

detail for newer judges. The longer videos will be optional for all judges but are strongly encouraged for new judges.

Judge training will be accessible through the [FIRST Dashboard](#). Judges will be alerted when the judge training is available by their Judge Advisor.

Judge training is held remotely but some Judge Advisors may opt to do a refresher on day 1 of the event. *FIRST* Robotics Competition events may choose to host a 'Judge Welcome' of some sort to nurture relationships and/or network among judges (who may be sponsors, alumni, etc) if they wish, but must be able to cover any associated costs. Judge Advisors will be asked to cover a few important topics on day 1 of the event as a reminder to all judges.

Volunteer Registration

All *FIRST* volunteers, including judges, are required to apply to volunteer at the event online. 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* website, <http://my.firstinspires.org/Dashboard/>. They create a personal profile that includes their contact information and interest in specific event positions. Judges should be instructed to access Volunteer Registration to create a profile or to ensure their information is accurate annually. All volunteers are screened - this includes a criminal background check and a sex-offender registry check.

FIRST Volunteer Management System (VMS)

The Volunteer Coordinator (VC), Judge Advisor (JA), *FIRST* Program Delivery Partner, and *FIRST* 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*. 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.

Judge Room Supplies

The Planning Committee will need to supply certain items for the judge room at the event. The following is a list of items required:

- Laptop
 - Can be provided by the Judge Advisor or purchased for the event
- Printer (optional)
- (2) full pads of flip-chart paper and one flip-chart stand
 - Hang large post-it paper (flipchart size) to the walls to assist in Award Deliberation. Write an award title at the top of each sheet.; include the award category. This is very helpful for the judges as they deliberate.
- Multi-pack box of colored markers (5-6)
- Ball point pens (one for each judge)
- Reams of white printer paper
- Sharpie black markers (fine point)
- Stapler with box of staples

- Box paperclips
- Clipboard for each judge
- Tissues
- Hand Sanitizer
- Masking Tape / Scotch Tape
- Sticky Notes
- Safety Glasses

These materials may be donated or purchased. If the materials must be purchased, a Planning Committee member must submit a request for the necessary supplies/materials to the Program Delivery Partner. The PDP is responsible for approving the request.

Judge Listing in *FIRST* Program Book

The Judge Advisor may be asked to extract some information for every judge at their event from VMS. Currently, we include name, title, and company of the judges in the *FIRST* Program Book if the Program Delivery Partner decides to add the information. Some PDPs may decide not to include the judges' names and instead do an overall thank you. The Program Delivery Partner (or their designee) will submit the information to *FIRST* by the deadline.

Judge Polos

Judge polos are available in both men's and women's sizes and the number provided will be shared with the Volunteer Coordinators. Orders will be submitted by the Volunteer Coordinator of each event. Please communicate with your event's Volunteer Coordinator to determine proper sizing. Any quantity of shirts over the approved amount will be charged to the event as an additional expense, all overages must be approved by the Program Delivery Partner.

We encourage you to keep the judge shirts in a safe place so that you may use them the following year to reduce cost. Judge shirts may only be given to current year judges, and they are **NOT** to be given to the Judge Advisor Assistants.

Sample Judge Time Commitment

Being a *FIRST* judge **requires** at least a two full-day time commitment as well as reviewing the judge training materials. Due to the nature of the judging process, this two-day commitment is essential since the judging process is such that interviews and discussions on day 1 get carried over to decisions that are made on day 2. It is unfair to the balance of the judge panel, and to the teams to recruit judges who cannot commit to the time requirements. If a potential judge cannot make the two-day commitment, ask if there is someone else in their organization who is qualified that can make that commitment. Potential judges should also be made aware of the hours they are needed on site. Individuals who cannot make a complete commitment should be encouraged to become involved in some way other than judging. Most Judge Advisors ask their judge panels to be on site and in the room by 7:30 a.m. on both days of the competition.