**FIRST® LEGO® League Frequently Asked Questions**

Thank you for your interest in FIRST® LEGO® League. We have developed this FAQ sheet to help teachers, parents, and community members better understand the program and how to get involved.

**WHAT IS FIRST and FIRST LEGO League?**

**FIRST** is an organization that designs innovative, engaging mentor-based programs to inspire young people (grades 1-12) to be science and technology leaders and innovators. The programs not only build science, engineering and technology skills and interest, they also help to foster well-rounded life capabilities including self-confidence, communication, and leadership. There are four FIRST programs in total. FIRST LEGO League is the program for upper elementary and middle school students, ages 9-14.

**How is FIRST LEGO League Structured/Organized on a local level?**

FIRST partners with regional organizations to make their programs available to youth worldwide. Here in Idaho, the University of Idaho’s Extension 4-H Youth Development program is the Affiliate Partner for FIRST LEGO League Jr., FIRST LEGO League, and FIRST Tech Challenge. As the Affiliate Partner, UI Extension 4-H Youth Development oversees the program and provides support for teams throughout the state. We are your primary point of contact for these programs, so if in doubt, call us!

**My child is a gifted 7/8 year old who loves LEGO. Can they participate in FIRST LEGO League?**

FIRST LEGO League is intended for youth ages 9-14. While there are certainly youth who exhibit exceptional building and technology skills before age 9, the ability to handle the pressures of competition and emotional maturity required to work collaboratively and effectively as a member of a team are typically not yet developed in younger students. Therefore, we strongly recommend that any youth under the age of 9 participate in FIRST LEGO League Jr., which is designed for ages 6-10.

**How do I get my child on a team?**

Due to the popularity of FIRST LEGO League, it can be difficult for a young person to join an existing team. The majority of Idaho teams are private, neighborhood-based teams, so if you don’t know someone already on the team, it can be difficult to join. If you are able to locate a team that is accepting new members, please be aware that being a part of a FIRST LEGO League team requires commitment from both team members and parents. Teams expect their members to be present and ready to contribute at every meeting. They may expect parents to help with team meetings, fundraising and/or chaperoning at competitions and team field trips. Many established teams have a competitive process to choose new members, and are more likely to choose a new teammate who has the family support and internal motivation to meet the team’s self-set standards. Due to child protection and internet privacy regulations, University of Idaho 4-H Youth Development cannot disclose contact information for existing teams and coaches. With your permission, we can give your name and email address to our existing coaches and ask them to contact you directly if they have an opening. There are also a few schools, libraries, and out-of-school time programs (scout groups, church youth groups, Boys & Girls Clubs, etc.) who run open teams that form at the beginning of each season. You might want to ask the organizations in which your child is already involved—if they don’t have a team, they might be interested in starting one!

**How can I guarantee my child will be able to participate this season?**

The only way to be 100% sure your child is able to participate in the upcoming season is to form a new team. The first step is to find similarly interested youth and their parents who will commit to seeing the program through. The FIRST LEGO League season in Idaho runs from August 1st through the end of January, and most teams will meet 1-2 times per week during the season. Start asking your child’s friends and their parents. Check with your neighborhood association, homeschool group, scout troop, church, or any other organizations, clubs or sports teams with which your family is involved to see if there is interest in forming a robotics team. Teams can have anywhere from 2-10 youth team members.

Each team is required to have two adult (age 18+) coaches. No technical expertise is required: Coaches are there to facilitate and encourage the team’s learning process, and to keep the team on track, not to demonstrate building or programming step by step. In addition to the UI Extension 4-H Robotics office, which you are welcome to call or email any time for help, we provide
weekly e-newsletters, educational webinars and online open Q&A sessions, and we can help connect rookie teams with more experienced teams who are willing to mentor them through the first season.

Once I find others who are willing to commit, how do I start the team?

The next step is to register the team with FIRST. This is done online through the FIRST website at www.firstinspires.org. Create a user account by clicking the Sign Up link at the top right of the homepage and filling out the online form. Please use an email address you will check regularly during the season, as this is the contact information our office will receive for you, and email is our primary means of communication. Once you have a user account, you can log in to view the Dashboard where you can complete the team registration process, order your team’s LEGO Mindstorms EV3 kit, and pay via credit card, purchase order, or check. If you have any questions, please call the UI Extension 4-H Robotics office for help.

What kind of equipment will our team need and how much will it cost?

UI Extension 4-H Robotics estimates a rookie team will spend between $1,600 and $2,000 for their first year of competition. This includes investment in the EV3 Robotics kit and materials to build a practice table, both of which are reusable year-to-year. In subsequent years, team costs drop significantly, to around $700 - $900. Please see the FIRST LEGO League Team Sample Budget for this year for more information. All FIRST teams are welcome and encouraged to seek local sponsors to help cover team costs. There is also a very limited amount of funding available each year to help qualified teams get started. Please contact the UI Extension 4-H Robotics Office for more information on these opportunities.

I don’t know anything about robots/programming/engineering/etc. Can you find a coach for my team?

One of the first tenants of the FIRST Coaches’ Promise is “The children do the work. This is their opportunity to learn and grow. The children on my team do all of the programming, research, problem solving, and building. Adults can help them find the answers, but cannot give them answers or make decisions.” What does that mean? It means that it doesn’t matter if you don’t understand the code or how the robot works. It's the coaches’ job to facilitate the team meetings, keep the team on task, and handle the administrative functions of the team. Please download and review the FIRST LEGO League Coaches Handbook (https://www.firstinspires.org/node/3916) to learn more about being a coach, and then discuss with the other team parents who among you might want to take on the official coaching roles for the team.

When and where are the qualifying tournaments?

Tournament dates and venues are finalized in October of each year. In general, the qualifying tournaments are held the first three weekends in November in locations throughout the State, and State Championships are held mid-to-late January. Please contact our office or check our Facebook Events Calendar (https://www.facebook.com/pg/UIExtensionRobotics/events/?ref=page_internal) to see events posted as they are finalized.

My team can’t accomplish all the missions. Should we skip the Qualifying Tournament to avoid disappointment?

Absolutely not! While Qualifying Tournaments are a competition, they are also a celebration of each team’s perseverance and hard work to meet the season’s challenge. The majority of the awards given at a FIRST LEGO League Qualifying Tournament are based on how your team performs in the judging rooms and have nothing to do with the robot game.

One of the keys to the FIRST LEGO League robot game is consistency. If your rookie team can accomplish even one or two missions on the game field with high consistency, they’re going to do just fine at the competition! It’s very rare, even for experienced teams, to be able to accomplish all the missions on the field, especially at the Qualifying Tournament level. Take your time, and remind the team frequently that teamwork, learning and working with the engineering design process, and most of all, having FUN are just as important as winning an award.

Who should I contact if I have additional questions?

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