

FIRST® Tech Challenge Frequently Asked Questions

Thank you for your interest in FIRST® Tech Challenge. 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 Tech Challenge?

FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) provides innovative, engaging, mentor-based programs designed 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* Tech Challenge is geared toward middle school and high school students (grades 7-12).

How is FIRST Tech Challenge Structured/Organized on a local level?

FIRST partners with regional organizations to make their programs available to youth worldwide. In Idaho, the University of Idaho's Extension 4-H Youth Development program is the Affiliate Partner Organization for *FIRST* LEGO League Jr., *FIRST* LEGO League, and *FIRST* Tech Challenge. As the Affiliate Partner Organization, 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 youth has a talent for building/coding, but a hard time connecting with others. Can they participate in FIRST Tech Challenge?

Absolutely! One of the great things about participating in a *FIRST* is teams' general acceptance and support of neurodiverse members. We have seen Idaho students with a wide range of social, learning, and physical differences all find ways to participate in these programs successfully, and develop new skills that have helped them transcend their prior barriers. Depending on a young person's particular set of circumstances, the team coaches may ask you as a parent to become a team mentor, both to help your child through the process of finding their role within the team, and to help other team members learn how best to work with their new teammate.

How do I find a team to join?

Due to child protection and internet privacy regulations, University of Idaho 4-H Youth Development cannot disclose direct contact information for existing teams or coaches. With your permission, we can give your name and email address to coaches in your area and ask them to contact you directly if they have an opening. Since about half of the *FIRST* Tech Challenge teams are school-based in Idaho, please check with the school to see if there is a team your student can join. If your school does not have a team, they might be interested in starting one if you're willing to help!

Whether a team accepts new members is entirely up to the Coaches' discretion. Many teams have an application or audition process for new members. Please be aware that being a part of a *FIRST* Tech Challenge team, just like being a part of any team, requires commitment from both team members and parents. Coaches and Mentors expect team members to be present and ready to contribute at every meeting, and to participate in team fundraising and outreach activities throughout the year. They may expect parents to help with team meetings, fundraising, team transportation, and chaperoning competitions.

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

The only way to be 100% sure your youth 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* Tech Challenge season in Idaho runs from September 7th through mid to late February, and most teams will meet 2-3 times per week during the season. Talk with your student's friends and their parents, 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. Most *FIRST* Tech Challenge teams in Idaho average from 5-10 team members, but team sizes can range from 3-15 youth.

Each team is required to have two adult (age 18+) coaches, who must submit to a youth protection background screening. Coaches are responsible for facilitating and encouraging the team's learning process, and to keep the team on track, not to solve problems or build the robot for the team. At the *FIRST* Tech Challenge level, we do recommend that teams also seek local

mentors with mechanical or programming knowledge to help your team build their skills. In addition to the UI Extension 4-H Robotics office, which you are welcome to call or email any time for help, we provide regular e-newsletters to teams and we can help connect rookies with more experienced teams who are willing to mentor new teams and/or help troubleshoot problems.

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 robot kit, and pay via credit card, purchase order, or check.

IMPORTANT: If you apply for team financial support through *FIRST*, DO NOT PAY the team registration before the grant funds appear on the Dashboard!!! 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 \$3,000 and \$5,000 for their first year of competition. This includes investment in a starter kit of parts, basic sensors, and robot control system, all of which are reusable year-to-year. Please see the *FIRST* Tech Challenge 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?

While we don't assign coaches to teams (just like we don't assign students to teams), we have resources to help you get started! First of all, it's OK not to know how to build a robot. Can you ask questions, organize, and keep a team on task? Then you have the essential skills to coach a *FIRST* Tech Challenge team. One of the primary tenants of *FIRST* is that it's just as much about learning and growing as a team as it is about robots. Our veteran teams are always willing to help rookies, and we can help direct you to a variety of resources that can help your team along.

When do teams compete?

Because *FIRST* Tech Challenge is still a relatively small program in Idaho, our only official event of the season is the Idaho Championship Tournament, held each year in February. There are some informal scrimmages each year that give teams an opportunity to play and collaborate with fellow teams prior to the Championship event. Location for the Championship varies, and will be announced once a venue contract is signed. Please contact our office or check our online Events Calendar (<https://www.uidaho.edu/extension/4h/programs/robotics/calendar>) to see events posted as they are finalized.

Our team isn't sure their robot is good enough to compete at the Championship. Should we skip it to avoid disappointment?

Absolutely not! While *FIRST* Tournaments are competitions, they are also celebrations of each team's perseverance and hard work to meet the season's challenge, and opportunities to network and learn from your fellow teams. If your rookie team has a driveable robot (or even if they don't – someone will help you get it going!), you are encouraged to come to the tournament. 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, and come prepared to make new friends and learn from your peers. FIRST Tech Challenge in Idaho is a community of learning, and we can't wait for you to join us!

Who should I contact if I have additional questions?



Robin Baumgartner, Program Coordinator
University of Idaho Extension 4-H Robotics
322 E. Front St. Suite 220
Boise, ID 83702
phone: 208-364-4603
cell: 208-420-2537
email: rbaumgartner@uidaho.edu