

## VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT AND RECOGNITION

### Overview

As part of our global robotics community, *FIRST*® volunteers build and bolster millions of young people to embrace innovation and collaboration. Our dedicated volunteers are the heart of our programs, and it is our amazing volunteer community that makes *FIRST* a success. *FIRST* volunteers share their talents, their passions, and their time to make a difference in the lives of students all over the world. Creating a memorable and high-quality volunteer experience is important to the success of our programs and will help improve volunteer retention and ensure sustainability. Event volunteers, coaches and mentors, and local planning committee members are all *FIRST* volunteers and are valuable members of the team.

### Volunteer Experience Toolkit

The Volunteer Experience Toolkit is a resource created by *FIRST* headquarters packed with tools and assets to help you appreciate and thank your volunteers. The toolkit is designed for partners, regional planners, event and tournament directors, and volunteer coordinators. Please feel free to share access to the toolkit with your key volunteers who plan events and manage other volunteers. To access this content, follow [this link](#) and enter the code: D2203695. If you do not have an existing Thinkscape account you will be prompted to create one. **Please do not share the toolkit with our general volunteer audience.**

The toolkit includes a wide variety of digital, downloadable assets, such as certificates of appreciation, thank you notes, customizable flyer templates, graphics and artwork, digital badges, social media graphics, and more.

### Engaging Volunteers Online

Investing time in volunteer engagement helps create community, improve the volunteer experience, and retain volunteers. Ideas for volunteer engagement include:

- Highlight volunteer stories on your website or social media
- Share stories about volunteers and teams in the news
- Encourage volunteers to share their stories
- Share user-generated content
- Encourage volunteers to tag you on social media when sharing their stories so you can share it back with your larger audience
- Give volunteers opportunities to provide feedback, either at events or through surveys
- Consider creating a local newsletter to educate people about *FIRST*, share local updates, and inform volunteers of upcoming events and volunteer opportunities
- Share the link to subscribe to the *FIRST* Volunteer Newsletter with your volunteers:
  - <https://info.firstinspires.org/volunteer-newsletter-subscription>
- Encourage volunteers to download this season's downloadable content (DLC) pack created just for volunteers:
  - <https://www.firstinspires.org/ways-to-help/volunteer/downloads>

### Recognizing Volunteers

Thanking and recognizing all *FIRST* volunteers is an important component of volunteer retention. Showing appreciation for volunteers can happen year-round and doesn't have to be limited to events. Some ideas for thanking and recognizing volunteers include:

- Post pictures on your website and social media platforms and give a shout-out to volunteers
  - You can recognize special key volunteers, volunteer award recipients, or just give a general shout-out and thanks to all the volunteers who make *FIRST* events and programs possible
- Thank You Notes
  - Send end-of-season thank you notes or emails
  - Print thank you notes for teams to write words of thanks for event volunteers or mentors and coaches at events
  - Create a Volunteer Gratitude Board where teams, parents, and other attendees can thank volunteers
- Recognize volunteers during events over the audio system, through signage, and at opening and closing ceremonies in front of an audience
- Hand out *FIRST* Year of Service pins or other volunteer gifts during event breaks or at lunch
- Use program books to highlight the name, title, and company of volunteer judges
- See the Volunteer Experience Toolkit for downloadable thank you notes and other resources for recognizing and thanking volunteers

### **Ordering Recognition Items**

The following recognition items can be ordered at no cost to you (shipping included) from the [Volunteer Recognition Portal](#) via Staples. This portal requires the creation of an account and order approval from the Volunteer Resources team. For quicker approval, use your *FIRST* email when making your Portal account.

- ***FIRST* Volunteer Passports**
  - Volunteer Passports can be given out to volunteers to commemorate their efforts and to create a piece of memorabilia from their time spent volunteering with *FIRST*. Event coordinators can design stamps or stickers for each event. Volunteers bring their passports when they volunteer at events to collect the stamps or stickers. Passport holders and lanyards can be ordered to accompany the passport. For help with designing stamps or stickers for your events, please see the Volunteer Experience Toolkit for artwork, graphics, and templates.
- **Season-specific swag with the Volunteer Experience theme**
  - Currently, we create season-specific volunteer swag that can be used to highlight the Volunteer Experience theme. You do not have to order all of the items listed below, but this menu of options is available for you to pick and choose what works best for your area and your volunteer community.
  - Items may include:
    - Stickers
      - Stickers can be ordered for every volunteer and used for volunteer engagement and recognition. Feel free to order extra stickers for outreach and recruitment events.
    - Buttons
      - Buttons may also be ordered for all volunteers.
    - Patches
      - Patches are a mid-level item. You might consider using patches for individuals who volunteer at more than one event.

- Additional Season-theme item
    - Occasionally we will stock a smaller season-specific gift item that you can give to volunteers.
- **Special Volunteer Gifts** (such as *FIRST* notebooks)
  - These items can be used as a thank you gift for a special volunteer, a raffle prize at lunch, or other volunteer giveaway. We suggest ordering 1-5 of each of these based on the size of your event and the number of volunteers.

The following recognition items can be purchased by you, members of your team, or individual volunteers through the [Volunteer Recognition Store](#) via Sports Awards:

- **FIRST Volunteer Year of Service Pins**
  - Year of Service lapel pins can be provided to volunteers as a thank you gift to highlight milestones of a volunteer's journey with *FIRST*. The pins come in intervals of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 15, 20 and 25 years.
  - You might consider presenting the pins to volunteers at lunch or celebrating significant milestones by recognizing volunteers at the closing ceremony.
- **Alumni Volunteer Patch**
  - The Alumni Volunteer patch is to celebrate those alumni who have continued their journey with *FIRST* by becoming a volunteer.
- **Seasonal Mentor / Coach Pin**
  - In honor of National Mentoring Month in January, *FIRST* headquarters produces a commemorative mentor coach lapel pin in the season's theme design. These pins may be purchased by you or members of your team in bulk and shared with the mentors and coaches in your region or may be purchased individually by your volunteers.
- **Custom Lapel Pin for your Event or Region**
  - The Volunteer Recognition Store gives you the ability to design and order your own custom lapel pin and backer card. These can be fun to create for a specific event or for your region.

### **FIRST Mentor/Coach Certificate & Pin**

All *FIRST* Robotics Team Mentors and Coaches are eligible to receive a *FIRST* Mentor/Coach Pin and Certificate of Appreciation each year. *FIRST* provides a downloadable certificate accessible via the [www.firstinspires.org](http://www.firstinspires.org) dashboard. Mentors must register with *FIRST* via team invitation to download their certificate. Certificate templates are also available in the Volunteer Experience Toolkit for download by you or your team. *FIRST* Mentor/Coach pins can be purchased using the Volunteer Recognition Store via Sports Awards by you, your team, or individual mentors and coaches.

### **Regional Outstanding Volunteer of the Year**

#### **Award Criteria**

The Outstanding Volunteer of the Year Award is presented to **one** individual, business, or organization at each regional event (and the state/regional District Championship) who consistently excels in their efforts with proven results in the following areas:

- **Impact** to their state, town, or region, by incorporating *FIRST* programs and actively supporting *FIRST*'s mission to design accessible, innovative programs that build self-confidence, knowledge and life skills while motivating young people to pursue opportunities in science, technology, and engineering.
- **Leadership** stature established through example and involvement with the *FIRST* organization; a personal and professional resource, advocate and mentor to their peers, affiliates, participants, volunteers, communities and *FIRST* supporters.
- **Personal Commitment** consistently displayed through selfless contributions of funds, time and energy. Motivation source is one of benefiting others as opposed to a personal or professional gain.
- **Community** involvement has resulted in positive community relations for the *FIRST* organization and its affiliates as well as an established long-term commitment to the *FIRST* mission through partnership development representing schools, universities, corporations, other non-profit groups, civic organizations, educators, professionals, parents, volunteers, civic leaders and community members.
- **Historical Contributions** support the *FIRST* mission through the length of service, commitment to program incentives, participants and supporters over an extended period of time.
- *\*Recipients of this award should be those who have not received this award previously.*

#### **Deadline for Submission of Outstanding Volunteer of the Year Name**

Each Regional Committee is responsible for choosing one individual, business, or organization to receive this award for that event. This award is engraved with the recipient's name. Take care to ensure that the submitted name is spelled correctly. Supply the name to *FIRST* by no later than the date indicated in the FRC Planning Calendar (Section 17).