

The Compass Alliance Pathways: Planes, Trains, and Automobiles

Planning transportation for your team members and organizing your equipment for travel to competitions can be a daunting task, but it is integral to a successful competition. This resource will discuss options when buying plane tickets for large groups, coordinating drivers for shorter distances, arranging bus transportation for longer distances, communicating travel logistics with your team, shipping your robot equipment, and more!

Level 0: Key Steps Before Arranging Travel

1. Before making any travel arrangements, determine who on your team will be in charge of the team's travel.
 - a. Usually, a committed parent or coach is the best option because of easy access to a credit card and because they are of legal hotel-buying and car-renting age.
2. If you are planning to attend competitions as a school-sponsored field trip, be sure to **check with the school administration** that your students have filled out all the necessary forms and the trip meets all the requirements.
 - a. For example, 1678's school district requires the Chief Business Officer to sign all contracts for liability reasons. This must be taken into account regarding the expediency of getting contracts signed and deposits paid.
 - b. If you are attending an out-of-state or out-of-country event, be sure that everyone has appropriate levels of health insurance. There are also many travel insurance policies available that will save time and money if anything goes wrong.
 - i. Check with your school district regarding what your district covers for both health and travel insurance.
3. **Plan ahead and stay organized!**
 - a. Student Transport
 - i. Collecting all of the required travel information for flights and hotels at the beginning of the season expedites making reservations. This includes passport numbers and cover pages if you are attending an overseas event.
 1. If attending an international event, be sure that everyone meets the entry/exit requirements, including having the appropriate visa(s) and passport(s). Most countries have entry requirements that mandate passports be valid for 3 to 6 months after the date of entry into the foreign country.
 - ii. If you are attending off-season events and students are staying in a hotel overnight, make reservations during the summer, if possible.
 1. On the [FIRST Housing & Travel](#) page, teams can book hotels near Championship venues at lower costs exclusive to *FIRST* teams.
 2. Be sure you have met all hotel requirements-- if multiple students are staying in a room, some hotels want the names of each student.

- iii. Creating an itinerary for each event makes it easier to visualize the activities in each day and also allows other students to review what they will be doing.
 1. Many events offer their own itinerary on their website. Use it as a guide when making your own.
 2. Be sure to include restaurants in your itinerary. It is important to ensure the team is eating properly throughout the competition. When considering restaurants, be sure to account for any food allergies. Also, be certain the restaurants are team-friendly and will be able to handle the size of your group.
 3. Remember things can, and will, go wrong. Be flexible as the competition goes late, students get sick, etc.
- b. Robot Transport
 - i. Most teams will use a truck hitched to a trailer holding their robot and tools. Most towns have truck rentals, but make sure you rent a truck with a hitch.
 1. Many vendors, including but not limited to [U-Haul](#), [Penske](#), and [Budget](#), offer trucks and trailers to rent.
 2. Be sure your hotel has room to park your trailer in a safe location.
 - ii. If your team is going to an event overseas or an event that requires you to fly, you will need to put your robot and as many tools as possible in a crate.
 1. *FIRST*[®] provides specific instructions on [making](#) and [using](#) a crate on their website. You may only use one robot crate when going to *FIRST* Championship. Additional crates are allowed, but the team is responsible for the entire expense related to them.
 2. If your team is flying to an event, be sure to think about how you will transport your tools, documentation, etc. Many teams require their students to leave a certain amount of luggage space for team items.
 - iii. Make sure you have ratcheting straps to secure everything inside a trailer or crate. Some companies may provide them, but it is best to have extra!
- c. Student Safety
 - i. Especially when traveling in large groups, it is imperative to keep track of everyone traveling. A student getting injured on a trip (especially a school-sponsored one) can cause massive legal issues for both your team and school district.
 1. For larger groups, assign everyone a number and do frequent count-offs to quickly make sure all students are present and with the group.
 - ii. There should be a clear protocol for injuries that all parent chaperones and students are aware of.
 1. There are EMT stations at every event, but if someone is severely injured, it is best to call 911 immediately. The student's health should always come before protocol.
 2. Every group of students (scouts, pit team, etc.) should have a fully stocked first aid kit nearby.
 - a. [Here](#) is a list of suggested items to have in a first aid kit.

3. All chaperones should know about any mild to severe allergies that students have.
 - a. Every student should fill out a medical information form and give it to the team/school district. This form is not just for filing away! Make sure all chaperones know what to do if a student needs to use an EpiPen or another medical device.

Level 1: Specific Modes of Travel

1. Arranging Carpools

- a. Having parents drive students to competitions is a great way to save on travel expenses and get more parents involved in team activities.
- b. Around 4 weeks before a competition, send out an email blast to all team parents asking if they are willing to drive students.
 - i. Be sure to reconfirm closer to the event to make sure no other commitments come up.
- c. For overnight events, 1678 reserves room for parent drivers at the group rate but does not pay for them. It's extremely important the team understands the specific district and team policies regarding transporting students.

2. Booking Flights

- a. As soon as the team captain or coach requests to attend an event, make a list of all potential flights to that location and collect necessary team member information
 - i. Using a spreadsheet is an effective way to keep all the information organized
- b. Once event attendance is confirmed, call in a group reservation
 - i. This is where communication with the head coach is key! It is best to book flights as soon as possible.
 - ii. Be aware that different airlines have different procedures for group reservations, and in some cases, group reservations can be more expensive.
- c. Many hotels offer shuttles from the airport to the hotel. Consider this when looking for the best hotel.
 - i. If no shuttle is offered, you can either hire a third-party one or go in groups in taxis. Either way, transport from the airport must be planned ahead of time.

3. Ground Transportation - Buses

- a. Find a third-party company to hire
 - i. Many school districts have a list of pre-approved bus vendors.
 - ii. Some school districts may offer use of their own school buses. This is a good choice to save on expenses.
- b. Be aware of restrictions! These will affect expenses, travel team size, and travel time.

- i. The biggest buses only fit 55 passengers
 - ii. Bus drivers legally cannot drive more than 12 hours without an 8 hour rest or a second driver to take over in the United States.
 - iii. For international travel, determine the driving restrictions for the country to which you will travel.
- c. Check weather and route carefully for possible delays such as traffic, weather, etc.

Level 2: Packing but Packier

Once you have the basics down, there are many things your team can do to make your travel more efficient and easier for everyone involved!

1. Sharing space with other teams

- a. Many teams attending regionals very far away from their shop arrive during the week before an event. If this is your home regional and your shop is near the event, consider reaching out to visiting teams, asking if they would like to share your space to store their robot and tools before the event begins.
- b. In 2017, 1678 and several other teams decided to ship their robots and rent two eighteen-wheelers to drive all their pit supplies to *FIRST* Championship and back. If your team wants your full pit setup and is located in the US, reach out to other teams to try and save on expenses.

2. International Travel and Packing Light

- a. Especially when traveling internationally, the cost of transporting materials adds up quickly. You need to consider if it will be cheaper to ship materials or purchase them upon arrival. Some tricks include:
 - i. Plastic shelving units are very cheap and are an easy thing to remove from a shipping list.
 - ii. If your team buys a few extra tools while at a faraway competition, don't throw them away when the event is over. Contact other *FIRST* Robotics Competition teams in the area (maybe even some rookies!) and ask if they'd like to have them.
 - iii. Especially for smaller items, take advantage of students' suitcases and carry-ons. Smaller or more delicate items will be safer with a person and you are able to bring more stuff with you.
 - iv. Most hardware stores will have cheap mover trolleys that can be used as robot carts.
 - v. If you are from a country that uses a different measurement system than the one you are competing in, be sure to prioritise bringing tools/parts that may be difficult to find.

About The Compass Alliance

The Compass Alliance was founded by 10 teams from around the world with the mission of helping *FIRST* Robotics Competition teams sustain and grow. A growing Resource Repository, and 24/7 Call Center give anyone of any skill level the tools to learn something new or learn more from anywhere in the world. Remote teams lacking mentors can sign up for a Tag Team to be their remote guide throughout the season, and Help Hubs pinpoint where to gain access to local services other *FIRST* teams offer. Hear For You provides the resources and tools to help teams and volunteers develop mental wellness on their teams and at events. You can learn more about The Compass Alliance, find quality assistance, and get involved at www.thecompassalliance.org

About This Resource

This resource was prepared by The Compass Alliance, with the support and overview of *FIRST*. If you have questions about this resource, please contact thecompassalliance@gmail.com or firstroboticscompetition@firstinspires.org.

Revision History

Revision #	Revision Date	Revision Notes
1.0	Oct. 2018	Initial Release
2.0	Aug. 2019	Minor changes: small grammatical/spelling errors.
3.0	Jan. 2020	Minor changes & updated links and suggestions