

JUDGE ADVISOR TRAINING

FIRST® LEGO® LEAGUE Challenge
UNEARTHEDSM Season
2025-2026



IN THIS SERIES...

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2. **The 2025-2026 UNEARTHEDSM theme and NEW IN 2025**
3. An overview of the Judge Advisor role
4. Understanding the documentation
5. Preparing for the event
6. What to do on the day
 - The coaches' meeting
 - The scheduled judging interviews
7. Award deliberations
8. The Dashboard and the Official Judging Spreadsheet
9. The closing ceremony script
10. Contact details and next steps

THANK YOU!

thank you

THIS YEAR'S THEME: UNEARTHEDSM

During this archaeology-inspired season, teams use STEM and collaboration skills to unearth new findings about themselves and their collective communities to help build a better world.

Archaeologists use the archaeological process to reconstruct and understand the artifacts they have unearthed. Whether they are excavating a site or studying materials in a laboratory, it takes people working together with technology to find the clues needed to understand how past generations lived, learned, and celebrated.

In the UNEARTHEDTM season, each team's challenge is to **identify a problem faced by archaeologists and propose a solution that can help.**



PROJECT SPARKS

The Engineering Notebook contains “project sparks” – scenarios and questions to get teams thinking about possible project ideas. These include:

- How archaeologists identify possible locations for artifacts
- How technology can be used to map archaeologic sites
- What tools archaeologists use to excavate fragile artifacts
- How restoration processes can be improved
- How archaeologists can work with professionals in other careers

The Engineering Notebook also includes a “careers and technology” page. The list includes archaeologists, site managers, lab technicians, conservators, anthropologists and geologists. This page can also inspire engaging and innovative project ideas!

WHAT'S NEW THIS YEAR?

Last season saw major changes to judging, including the new Peer Award, the introduction of the Final Share & Feedback interview component, and updates to rubrics.

There are **no major changes to awards or processes** for this season. However, some new resources are available.

On firstaustralia.org:

- Updated Official Judging Spreadsheet (AUS version) available from firstaustralia.org

On firstinspires.org – US-specific, so use with caution!

- Judge Guide and Quiz
- Judge Advisor Checklist, Judge Training Script and Judge Training Slide Deck

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

Please be aware that different regions follow different procedures and use different document versions. As a Judge Advisor for an Australian event, it is important that you are using:

- Up-to-date judging materials for the 2025-2026 UNEARTHEDSM season
- Modified Judging Session Scripts, available from the FIRST Australia website
- The Australian version of the Official Judging Spreadsheet, available from the FIRST Australia website

Ask your tournament director for access to the appropriate page on the FIRST Australia website.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

FIRST is committed to fostering, cultivating and preserving a culture of equity, diversity, and inclusion. We embrace and encourage differences in race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion, income, language, learning difference, or any other characteristics that make our adult-force and students unique.

You can help by:

- Checking with your Tournament Director about accessibility of judging rooms
- Requesting that coaches to let you know in advance about students who may require special considerations
- Sharing relevant EDI training materials with your judges
- Reminding volunteers to keep the *FIRST* Core Values in mind at all times!

FIRST[®] Core Values



DISCOVERY

We explore new skills and ideas.

INNOVATION

We use creativity and persistence to solve problems.

IMPACT

We apply what we learn to improve our world.

TEAMWORK

We are stronger when we work together.

INCLUSION

We respect each other and embrace our differences.

FUN

We enjoy and celebrate what we do!



THE JUDGE ADVISOR ROLE

WHAT IS THE JUDGE ADVISOR'S ROLE?

“Rather than judge teams, the judge advisor **oversees the judging process** and judging quality for the event. The judge advisor ensures that *FIRST* LEGO League Challenge Standards for Judging and Awards are followed and *FIRST* LEGO League event rubrics are used. Judge advisors are responsible for overseeing all judges for the event, including any necessary **pre-event communication and training**.

“Judge advisors assure paperwork is provided for the judges (including rubrics, session flowchart, judge questions, session script and awards list) for each pod. Being a Judge advisor requires familiarity with the advancement policy and training to use the Official Judging Spreadsheet.

“Judge advisors should always uphold and model the *FIRST* **Core Values**: Discovery, Inclusion, Innovation, Impact, Teamwork and Fun.”

WHAT DOES THE JUDGE ADVISOR DO?

Before the event:

- Liaise with the tournament director
- Ensure judges receive training

On the day:

- Attend the coaches' meeting
- Keep judging sessions on time
- Run deliberations
- Prepare the closing ceremony script (and PowerPoint)

After the event:

- Submit awards and advancing teams to the Tournament Director

WHAT ARE THE KEY DOCUMENTS?

For the Judges:

- Judging Session Flowchart
- Judging Session Script (AUS Version)
- Rubrics
- Awards
- *Team List*
- *Judging Schedule*

For the Judge Advisor:

- Awards and Allocation
- Participation Rules
- Coach/Mentor Award and Peer Award nomination forms
- *Full Team Schedule*



BEFORE THE EVENT

PLANNING FOR THE EVENT

The Tournament Director is responsible for recruiting volunteers and assigning judges via the *FIRST* Australia system. Before the event, you need to:

- Request a volunteer list, including email addresses, so that you can make contact with your judges. Make sure they know where to find the judge training videos!
- Check that there are enough judges for the event.
 - On the day, judges work in **pods**. Each pod has 3 judges and can interview **at most 4 teams**.
 - An event with 24 teams will require $(24 \div 4) \times 3 = 18$ judges.
- Confirm that all judges are 18+ and are not affiliated with a team competing at your event.
- Allocate judges to a pod and role.
 - Each pod needs a **robot design, innovation project** and **core values** judge.
 - You should also assign one person to be the **lead judge** for each lane.
 - Aim for a good distribution of expertise and experience between pods.
- Ask the Tournament Director about teams with students requiring special considerations.

PRINTING AND SUPPLIES

At an in-person event, each pod should receive a clipboard with printouts of all the judging documents, and enough rubrics for four teams (plus spares). Judges will also need pens, highlighters and sticky notes – liaise with your Tournament Director to make sure these are available.

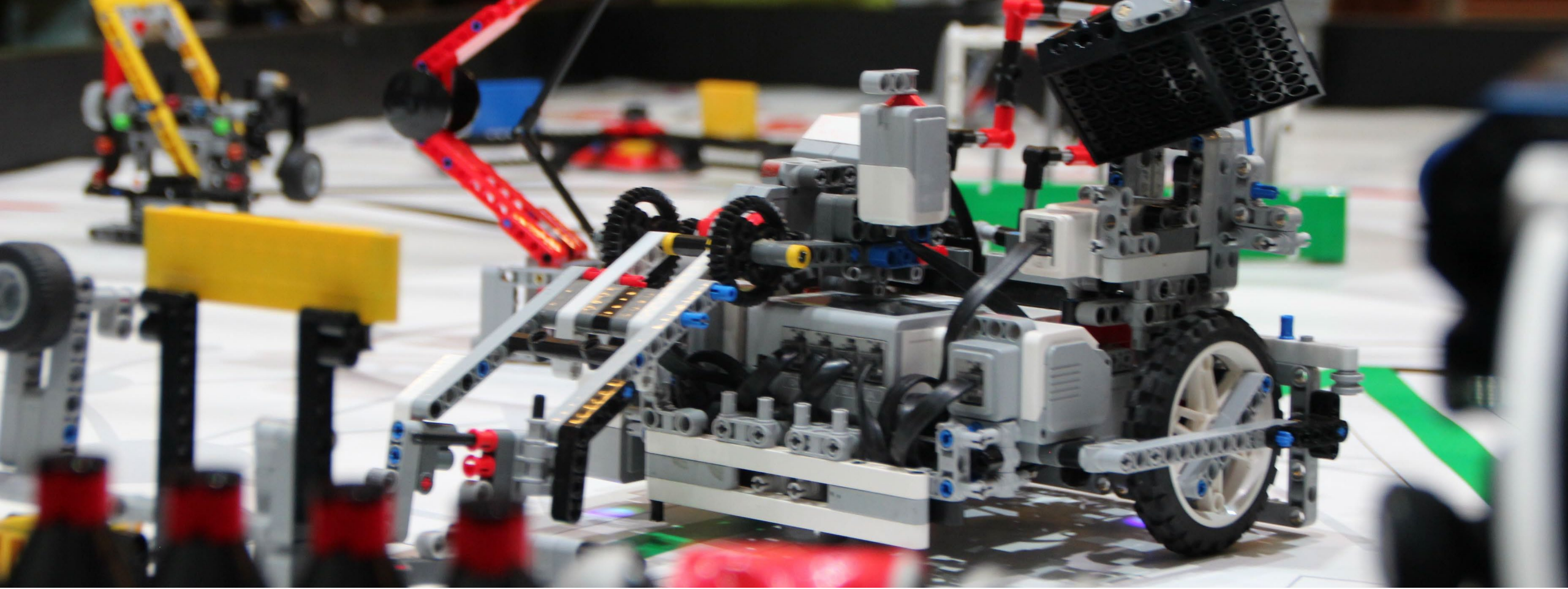
Some events are now **paperless** and will provide judges with tablets or laptops instead of printed documents. Ensure all devices have internet access and offline copies of key documents. Scrap paper and pens are still needed for these events!

Each pod **must** have its own room. There should be tables and chairs for the judges, and a clear open space for the team to do its presentation.

NOMINATION-BASED AWARDS

To be eligible for the Coach/Mentor Award, teams must submit a hard-copy nomination form. It is best to collect these at the **start** of the day – ask your Tournament Director to arrange for these to be handed in during team check-in, or at the coaches' meeting.

The Peer Award is based on nomination forms completed during the event. Talk to your Tournament Director about when and where these should be handed in.



ON THE DAY

JUDGE TRAINING?

Judges **must** watch the judge training video series prior to the event. On the morning of the event, ask the judges to attend a short meeting with you.

- Introduce yourself and the judging pods
- Remind the judges of their role in inspiring and encouraging the teams
- Run through the event schedule: ceremonies, judging sessions, deliberations and lunch!
- Let the judges know what AV (if any) is available in the judging rooms for teams
- Let the judges know that all the documentation can be found in their pod's folder (or on the provided device) and hand out the folders and stationery
- Don't forget to thank your judges and encourage them to **keep volunteering!**

While you attend the coaches' meeting, suggest that the judges check out their judging rooms, and then attend the Opening Ceremony.

COACHES' MEETING

The Tournament Director will introduce you and invite you to speak during the coaches' meeting. Use this opportunity to remind the coaches that:

- Teams must be on time (or early!) – robot rounds can be rescheduled but judging cannot
- Teams must be prepared with their Innovation Project props, robot and laptop (or code printouts)
- **All students** must attend the judging session
- The judging session is the team's time to shine – coaches cannot contribute, prompt or otherwise interfere
- Coaches can observe the judging session **but** the number may be limited (two allowed)
- Judges are **not** to be photographed or filmed
- Remind coaches to submit the Coach/Mentor Award nomination form!

Invite the coaches to let you know about any students that require special accommodations – and please let the relevant judges know ahead of the judging session.

SCHEDULED INTERVIEWS

While judging sessions are ongoing, the Judge Advisor's role is to:

- Monitor which teams have arrived for their session
 - At larger events, your Tournament Director may be able to provide you with a Judge Check-In volunteer
 - If a team is late, you can send the Judge Check-In volunteer to find them in the pits or at the Robot Game tables
- Keep judges on schedule, and remind them to complete rubrics and feedback as they go!
- **Deal with questions and concerns as they arise**

If you have the opportunity, consider using this time to collate and review the Coach/Mentor Award nomination forms.

DELIBERATIONS

The main role of the judge advisor is to guide the deliberations process and operate the **Official Judging Spreadsheet (OJS)**.

- All rubric data and (ideally) all robot game scores must be entered before deliberations commence.
- Awards **must** be allocated in the correct order, described in the first tab of the OJS and in the Awards and Allocation document.
 - Not all events receive all the optional awards. Your Tournament Director should let you know what group of awards is available at your event.
- Remember that teams can only receive **one** award, excluding the Coach/Mentor Award, Robot Performance Award, and Peer Award.
- Teams care more about being recognised than what they are being recognised for.
 - However, it is important to get the Champion's Award winner and advancing teams right!
- **What happens in the judging room, stays in the judging room.**

AWARD ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for **any** award, teams must:

- Have between 2 and 10 members
- Be aged 9-16 years at the start of the year the challenge is released
- Participate in **all** four aspects: Robot Game, Innovation Project, Robot Design and Core Values
- Demonstrate the FIRST® Core Values and behave with Gracious Professionalism at all times

Award eligibility is outlined in the Participation Rules document.

HOW TO DETERMINE AN AWARD

1. Sort the OJS according to the appropriate criteria then identify the top 2-4 teams.
2. Invite one judge from each relevant pod to speak about the team – limit speaking time to 1-2 minutes.
3. After everyone has spoken, check if any pods want to withdraw their team from consideration.
4. If there appears to be a clear winner, try to bring the judges to a consensus decision.
5. Otherwise, invite other judges to ask follow up questions. If no consensus can be reached, the award can be put to a vote.

AWARD ALLOCATION ORDER

The award allocation order is described in the first tab of the OJS and on the last page of the Judge Advisor's Awards and Allocation document.

Here is a summary:

1. Champion's Award 1st Place, 2nd Place, 3rd Place...
2. 1st Place Core Awards: Core Values THEN Innovation Project THEN Robot Design
3. 2nd Place Core Awards: as above, then 3rd Place...
4. Optional Awards: Engineering Excellence THEN Breakthrough THEN Rising All-Star THEN Motivate
5. Coach/Mentor Award, Robot Performance Award and Peer Award are usually left until the end but can be done at any stage

ADVANCEMENT

The number of advancing teams from your event is based on event size – ask your Tournament Director for the exact number.

Advancement eligibility is based on Champion's Award criteria, meaning they must do well across the board.

Consequently, it is possible for a team to win the Robot Performance Award and the Robot Design award and **not** advance, if they did not do well on Innovation Project or Core Values criteria.

THE COACH/MENTOR AND PEER AWARDS

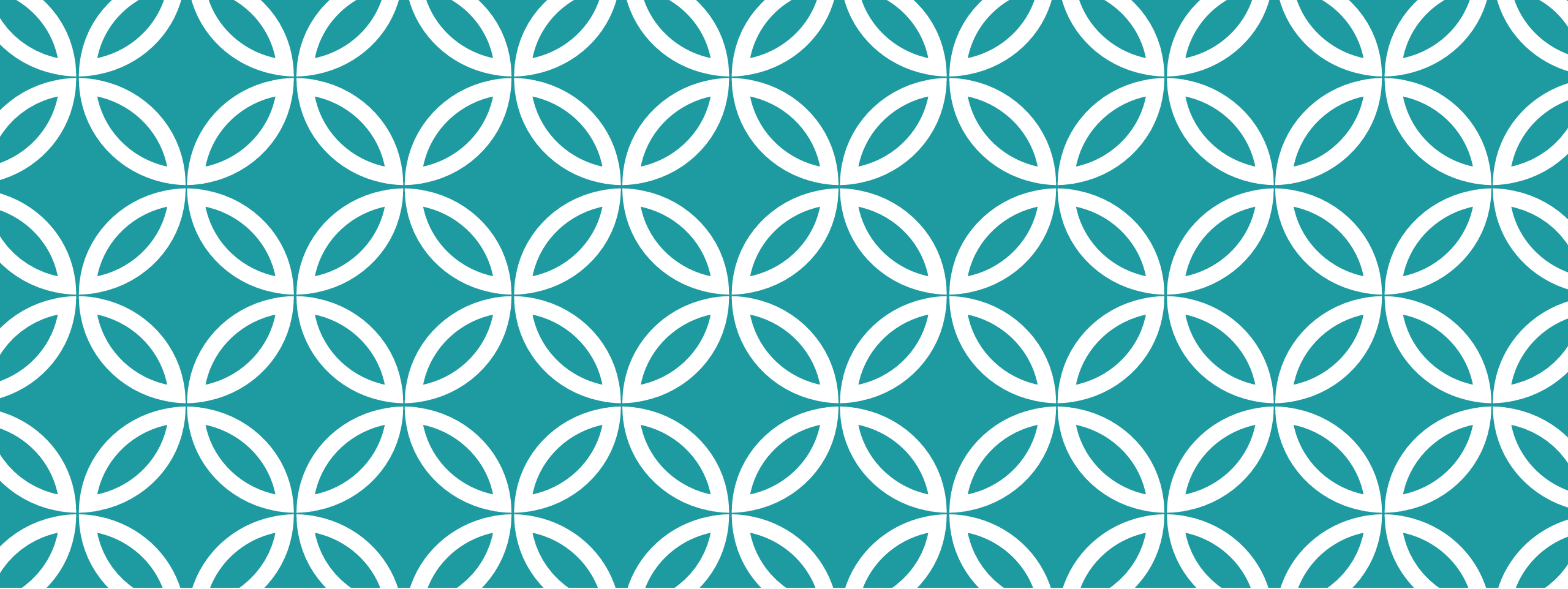
Coaches must be nominated by their team using the **official nomination form** to be eligible for the Coach/Mentor Award.

Don't waste deliberations time going through every nomination form as a group! Instead:

1. Ask one pod to read all the forms and select the best three.
2. Have the pod summarise the three selected nominations during deliberations.
3. Reach a decision through consensus or vote.

Usually, one pod will finish earlier than the others. If not, the judge advisor can carry out this process.

The Peer Award is based on nominations made by teams during the event. You can use a similar process to decide this award.



THE DASHBOARD AND SPREADSHEET

The moment you've all been waiting for!

AWARD SCRIPTS

After the awards are decided, the judges can write the **award scripts**. These should:

- Describe why the team was chosen to receive the award
- Give clues about the winner but only reveal their identity in the last lines
- Be funny – use puns and jokes!
- Follow an AABB rhyme scheme (use **rhymezone.com**)

Award scripts can be either:

- 4 lines for the Champion's Award and 2 lines for the rest
- 8 lines for the Champion's Award, 4 lines for 1st place required awards and 2 lines for the rest

EXAMPLE SCRIPTS

2nd Place Champion's Award

This team's tech log goes all season long

Shooting for the moon their GP is strong

*Removing barriers for equal play they
lead, don't follow*

*The judges are very pleased to
congratulate Team Apollo*

Core Values Award

A truly inspirational team

That had a colourful hat theme

With the use of just three simple keys

They solved all of their problems with ease

CLOSING CEREMONY SCRIPT

The closing ceremony script is auto-generated by the OJS. However, a few things must be entered manually:

- The Coach/Mentor, Robot Performance Award and Peer Award winners
- The name of the relevant National Championship for advancing teams
- The event name, local sponsors and other details in the Opening and Closing Remarks
- The award scripts

This (and preparing the PowerPoint) is a great job for a judge assistant if you have one!

If your event is using hard-copy rubrics, return these to the teams at the end of the Closing Ceremony. Please check the rubrics and feedback before returning them!

AFTER THE EVENT

Following the event, please make sure the awards and **advancing teams** are provided to your Tournament Director to be communicated to FIRST Australia. We need this information to make contact with the advancing teams.

Completed rubrics should be returned to teams at the end of the Closing Ceremony. All other judging material should be disposed securely.





REMINDERS AND NEXT STEPS

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

To ensure consistency and fairness across Australian and international events, as the judge advisor you **MUST**:

- Attend the judge advisor training (check!)
- Confirm judges are 18+ and not directly affiliated with teams competing at the event
- Ensure all judges have been trained
- Check that each pod has a separate, private room to conduct judging sessions
- Use the **current judging rubrics** and related documents
- Use the **Australia version** of the Official Judging Spreadsheet
- Conduct a **deliberations process** involving all judges
- Follow the **awards structure** your event has been allocated
- Progress the correct number of teams to the relevant National Championship
- Contact FIRST Australia if you are unsure of any procedures

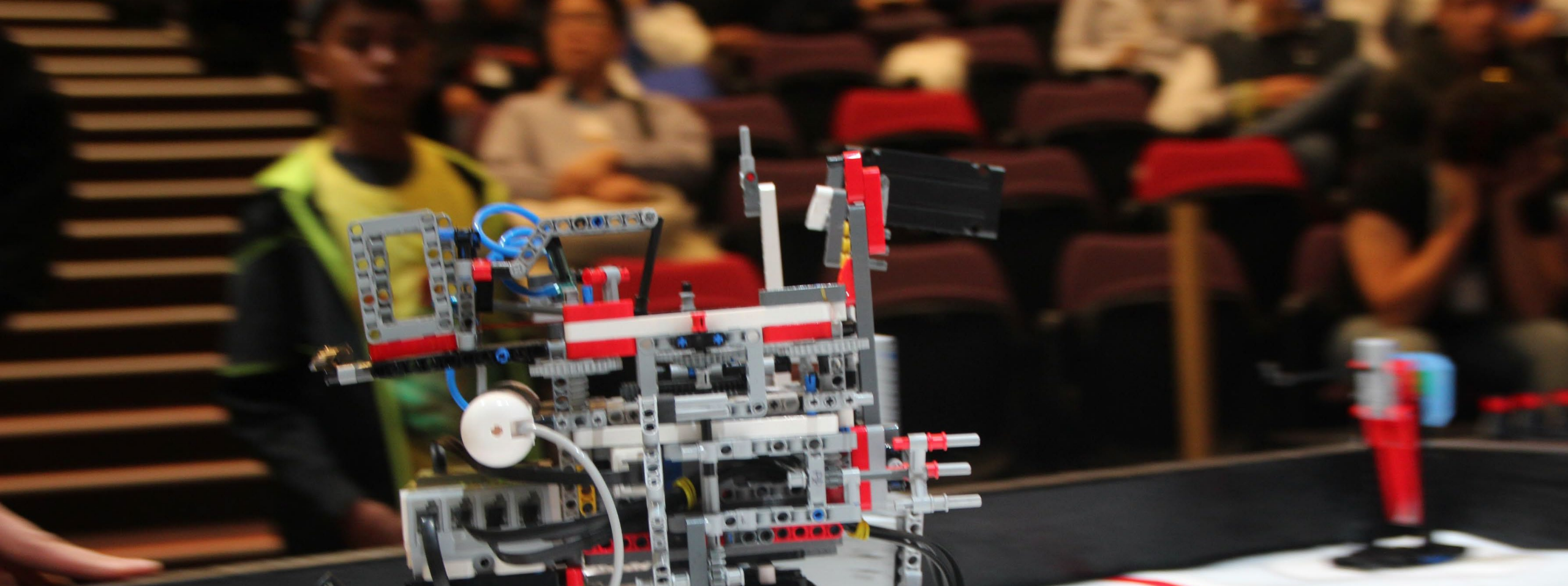
10 TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL EVENT

1. Be prepared
2. Resolve any problems right away
3. You will need to manage situations that are not in the rule book
4. Remember you're managing people, but...
5. Follow the rules
6. Focus on official and relevant judging criteria
7. Be aware of the time!
8. Create an atmosphere where everyone can contribute and have fun
9. See the teams!
10. Keep calm and robot on!

HOW TO CONTACT US

Judging questions: nationaljudgeadvisor_fll@ausfirst.org

Program questions: j.dwyer@mq.edu.au



QUESTIONS?