

California District Details

California is moving to the District Model of play for the 2026 season with some modifications where the entire state is one District but with two separate District Championships. Behind the scenes, California is going to operate a little differently than other districts. Rather than being operated by an independent nonprofit like other districts, *FIRST* will retain these responsibilities in California. This document provides more details about how this district will operate.

Overview

Teams in California can compete and earn points in any District Qualifier event in California. Teams will be ranked based on the region they are located in (Northern or Southern California) and advance to one of two District Championships. The top 60 teams in each area (North and South) will advance to a District Championship.

Each District Championship will advance its winning alliance and Cultural Award winners (*FIRST* Impact Award, Engineering Inspiration, and Rookie All-Star) to the *FIRST* Championship. The remainder of California's *FIRST* Championship slots will be allocated according to District Points across the state (i.e. with no North/South distinction), following the same allocation process in any other district (see section 11.5 of the [Game Manual](#) for details).

District Championship Allocations

The northern border of San Luis Obispo, Kern, and San Bernardino counties is the dividing line between Northern California and Southern California. Teams from those three counties, plus Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Diego, and Imperial counties are considered Southern California teams. Teams in the state's other 48 counties are considered Northern California teams.

Figure 1: Map showing current teams and boundaries for District Championship designation



Teams designated as Southern California will attend the Southern California District Championship and teams designated as Northern California will attend the Northern California District Championship regardless of where they compete for their district qualifier events.

Awards

District events present the same awards as Regional Events with a few minor tweaks.

The Dean's List Finalist Award is only presented at the District Championship. Each District event will have 1 or 2 District Championship Dean's List Semi-Finalists (the exact number will be decided by the District each season but the number will be the same across all events in California). Teams will submit their Dean's List Nominees to the District who will assign the student to one of the district events their team is attending to help balance the number of interviews at each event. Semi-Finalists will have a second interview at their team's designated District Championship (regardless of whether or not the team is competing, and regardless of where a student qualified).

The Woodie Flowers Finalist Award is only presented at the District Championship. Nominees are recognized at each District event. The exact number of Woodie Flowers Finalist Awards is to be determined but the plan is to divide the slots so that each District Championship presents the same number.

Some awards are classified as Cultural Awards by *FIRST*. The three Cultural Awards are the *FIRST* Impact Award, Engineering Inspiration Award, and Rookie All-Star Award. Teams who win the *FIRST* Impact Award at a district qualifier event will automatically qualify to compete for the award and to compete with their robot at the District Championship. Teams who win Engineering Inspiration or Rookie All-Star will qualify to compete for that award *only*, unless they earn enough points to qualify to compete with their robot. Teams who do not qualify with their robot may be interviewed in-person at their District Championship or may be offered a remote interview.

For the District Championships, *FIRST* allots each district a set number of Cultural Awards. California will divide the allocation evenly between Northern California and Southern California.

General Frequently Asked Questions

What does the "District Model of play" mean for teams?

Teams in the District Model play two district qualifier events for their initial registration fee. While registration fees vary year to year and have not yet been determined for 2026, you can view 2025 fees on the [Cost & Registration webpage](#). In addition to traditional awards, teams at these events earn District Points that rank them in the district. This ranking is used to advance teams to the District Championship. For California, the top 60 teams from Northern California will compete at the Northern District Championship and the top 60 teams from Southern California will compete at the Southern District Championship. The District Points model and method for advancement is detailed in Section 11.1 of the Game Manual. Teams cannot advance directly to the *FIRST* Championship from a district qualifier event.



I'm a team in California. Can I opt out of the California District?

No. All teams within the geographic region are in the district.

I'm a team from outside California. Can I opt in to the California District?

No. Currently, only teams within the geographic boundaries of the region are in the district. However, teams outside of California in another district can register for California district events through the standard inter-district play model already in use. As a friendly reminder: teams in a district outside of California will not earn district points at California district events.

Will there be an opportunity to learn more, ask questions, and provide feedback?

Yes. Teams in California will receive communication from their local leadership with more information on both virtual and in-person information sessions. Every California Regional event in 2025 will also host an in-person session to discuss these changes.

Is there anything I can do this year to help with this transition?

Yes! There will be more events in California than ever before (potentially 16 District Qualifier events and 2 District Championship events). That means there are going to be more volunteer roles to fill in 2026. You can help by signing up to volunteer at an event this year to help build the volunteer capacity required to facilitate the District Model. Even if you cannot volunteer at an entire event, there are roles available for partial shifts (such as robot inspecting). If you are interested in taking on a new volunteer role at events, please fill out [this form](#) or [contact local leadership](#) to discuss opportunities.

FIRST California Robotics exists. Why doesn't California just operate as a "traditional" district?

There is a strong desire in the state to move to this model of play for the 2026 season. It can be a challenge to set up a nonprofit large enough to support the traditional District Model in California. This new method allows *FIRST* to deploy the District Model of play in the region without having to set up a large local nonprofit. It's also not forever. California may eventually shift towards the traditional model.

Setting up a local nonprofit has also been a barrier to other regions moving to the District Model. If California is successful in this model, other regions may be able to replicate it in the future.

Are existing Districts going to move from being operated by local nonprofits to being operated by FIRST?

No, there are no plans at this point to move any other Districts away from their current operating model.

What about teams from outside California who like to play within California?

For 2026, nothing is changing regarding the District Model of play. This means that teams from areas in the Regional Model cannot play at California events. Beyond 2026, we are looking into



working on a way for Districts to open capacity to all teams outside their District, not just through inter-district play.

Where will the California District events be held?

This is still in process as we look to identify potential locations for the District Events and the District Championships. If you believe you know of a location that may work, please reach out to your [Regional Director](#) to discuss. Venue requirements to host a District Event can be found in the [District Venue Site Requirements document](#) on the [Event Planning Guides](#) webpage.

Can I as a team in Northern California team compete at an event located in Southern California?

Yes, all district qualifying events within California will be available to all California teams through the current event preferencing system. California teams will earn points at their first two California District events.

District Championship Frequently Asked Questions

Why are there two separate District Championships instead of one event with multiple divisions?

FIRST Robotics Competition teams in California are clustered in two fairly dense geographic regions. If one of the current Regional Event venues were to be chosen to host a single District Championship event, the venue with the shortest average travel distance would still require teams to travel over 200 miles on average. In order to minimize travel times for as many teams as possible, we decided to host two separate events. There are also more venues available that could host a 60-team District Championship than a 120-team District Championship with two divisions.

How will the District Championship Cultural Awards be distributed?

The number of Cultural Awards at each District Championship is set by the District based on a range determined by *FIRST*. The formula to determine the range is detailed on the [Championship Eligibility webpage](#). There will be an equal number of each team Cultural Award presented at each District Championship. For example, if the range given to the district by *FIRST* for the *FIRST* Impact Award is 1 to 3, California would have 1 *FIRST* Impact Award at each District Championship giving the district a total of 2 award winners.

How will advancement to the *FIRST* Championship from the District Championships be handled?

The automatic qualifiers from each District Championship event (Event Winning Alliance and Cultural Award Winners) will qualify. Then, District Points across the state will be used to fill the remaining slots.

How will teams be sorted into Northern or Southern California?

For the purposes of District Championship allocation, teams are sorted according to the county in which their team is located and registered. See page 1 for details and a map of the dividing line.

If I win the *FIRST* Impact award as a Northern California team at a Southern California event, do I go to the Southern California District Championship?

No, teams go to the District Championship based off their team's address. A Northern California team winning the Impact award will compete for the Impact award at the Northern California District Championship, regardless of the District Qualifier at which they won.

Is there any way a Southern California team can preference to go to the Northern California District Championship?

No, currently the District Championship a team goes to is based off their registered location.

If I am 61st on the Southern California Team district point list prior to the District Championship, but have more district points than the 60th Northern California team, can I qualify for and attend the Northern California District Championship?

No, only the top 60 Northern California teams will be able to qualify for the Northern California District Championship. With any solution, we know there are teams on the margins who would have qualified under different circumstances, but believe this solution is both an improvement over the present system and is the best balance of simplicity and recognition of teams.

Other Districts with multiple fields have the winners of each field face each other to determine an overall winner for the district. Will this happen for California?

No, the district will have two District Championship Winning Alliances. Due to time, location, and other factors there will not be an in-season event to determine an overall winner. Both winning alliances will have auto-qualification to the *FIRST* Championship.

How many teams will qualify for the *FIRST* championship?

This number can change year-to-year, so it's not possible to have a definitive number yet for 2026. If California was a district for 2025, the number would be approximately 45.

Districts receive the percentage of 'available slots' at *FIRST* Championship, rounded up to the nearest whole slot, equal to the percentage of teams they have in their District compared to the total of all *FIRST* Robotics Competition teams. 'Available slots' are calculated by taking the total number of slots at *FIRST* Championship and subtracting the number of pre-qualified teams. More details can be found in Section 11.5 of the [Game Manual](#).

How many Divisions will be at each District Championship?

In 2026, there will only be one division at each district championship. There is potential for this to increase in the future, but it will be dependent on future growth of teams within California and venue availability.

