2026 Regional Advancement Changes

Please note that this document covers the full changes that are being implemented in 2026. In 2025, a phased approach is being implemented as described in [this blog](#).

Overview

The new regional advancement model assigns teams points based on robot and awards performance at a given event. The 3 teams with the most total points at each event, who have not already qualified, automatically qualify for the *FIRST*® Championship. All non-event qualifying teams are ranked together in a global "Regional Pool", and the top ranked teams from this list are invited to *FIRST* Championship on a bi-weekly basis. All teams participating in the Regional model are in a single Regional Pool of teams.

One theme with this new model is a shift in how we think about advancement and rewarding teams. Winning an event or a particular award at an event is a fantastic accomplishment for that team, and we reward those teams at that event with recognition and physical items such as trophies and medals. Advancement to *FIRST* Championship is a separate type of recognition and reward that teams receive, and it doesn't need to be tied directly to specific awards or outcomes at events. This new advancement model more holistically rewards team performance with a slot on the global stage by incorporating a combination of both robot performance and cultural impact.

Points

Teams earn points in a similar manner to the district point system (as outlined in [Section 11.1 of the Game Manual](#)) with additional or modified criteria based on the specific goals of this new model.

Point Differences

- No changes to Qualification Round Performance, Alliance Captain, Draft Order Acceptance, Team Age, or Playoff Advancement points
- *FIRST* Impact Award points are set at 45
- Engineering Inspiration Award points are set at 28
- Rookie All Star Award points are set at 8
- Other awards are set at 5

A feature of this system is that these point values can be adjusted in the future to align the *FIRST* Championship event with *FIRST* values as the number of events or the size of the *FIRST* Championship change. While developing this model there

were several established target metrics for qualification rates, with point values being adjusted until these targets were achieved.

Ties

Ties are broken using the District team sort criteria as a base (Table 11-2 in the [2024 Manual](#)). Some small adjustments were made to ensure that teams who only play one event are rewarded equitably.

Regional Team Sort Criteria	
1st	Best Playoff Round Finish at a single event
2nd	Highest Qualification Round Seed or Draft Order Acceptance (i.e. Highest ALLIANCE Selection points at a single event)
3rd	Best Qualification Round Performance Points
4th	Highest Individual MATCH Score, regardless of whether that score occurred in a Qualification or Playoff MATCH
5th	Second highest Individual MATCH Score, regardless of whether that score occurred in a Qualification or Playoff MATCH
6th	Third highest Individual MATCH Score, regardless of whether that score occurred in a Qualification or Playoff MATCH
7th	Random Selection

Regional Event Qualifying Spots

At every regional event, teams earn points based on the above listed point system. The 3 teams who earned the most points at each event and who have not already qualified for the *FIRST* Championship qualify for the *FIRST* Championship.

- Regional teams can earn points from and qualify directly for the *FIRST* Championship at any Regional event they attend
- District teams do not earn points from regional events and cannot qualify via this method

Regional Pool

All non-event-qualifying teams are ranked together in the "Regional Pool" based on the points earned from their first two regional events. The top ranked teams from this pool

earn *FIRST* Championship qualification spots on a bi-weekly basis. This list helps ensure the top performing teams across events qualify for the *FIRST* Championship and allows for the consideration of performance across multiple events for teams. Looking at two events allows us to reward consistent performance over the season without being punitive to single-event teams.

This model follows a bi-weekly model where top ranked teams from the Regional Pool advance every 2 weeks (after Weeks 2, 4, and 6). At the end of every 2 weeks, the top *x* number of teams from the Regional Pool points ranking will be invited to the *FIRST* Championship. The same number of teams will be pulled from the list each time, so ⅓ of the teams from the Regional Pool are invited every 2 weeks. Using our model and looking at 2024, we would have invited 92 teams from the Regional Pool, meaning we would have offered 30-31 slots after Weeks 2, 4, and 6.

Single-event team points calculation

If a team has only played one event at the end of the interval, they are awarded second event points using this formula:

$$\text{second event points} = 0.6*(\text{first event points}) + 14$$

This model is based on a regression of Event 1 vs Event 2 points in 2024 and 2023. Thanks to Rachel Lim for her work on the original model for this. This calculation projects how many points would be earned by the average team who earned X points at their first event.

Waitlists

These changes eliminate the current Priority Waitlist and Waitlist. In the new model teams will be invited based on the points earned from their Regional events.

Pre-qualified Teams

In the current model, just over 30 teams are pre-qualified for *FIRST* Championship based on previous season performance or winning the *FIRST* Impact Award (FIA) at *FIRST* Championship. The following were pre-qualified in 2024: previous season's *FIRST* Championship Winning Alliance, Engineering Inspiration Winners, FIA Finalists, FIA Winner, and the last 10 years of FIA Winners (Hall of Fame teams). You can see full list on the Championship Eligibility page. There are no changes to *FIRST* Championship pre-qualification for 2025 as these teams were already awarded their spots at the 2024 *FIRST* Championship. For 2026 and beyond, all non-Hall of Fame pre-qualifications slots are being removed. The number of slots for Hall of Fame spots

are being reduced to the last 8 years. Holistically, the decision to remove these pre-qualification slots is based on trying to reward team's accomplishments for that season and maximizing the number of teams who can qualify each season.

Targets

When developing this model, the following goals and target metrics were established. During each phase of the development process, the model was evaluated to ensure these targets and goals were being met.

- Take all stakeholders into account
- Align with *FIRST* Core Values
- Preserve the concept of pre-qualified teams but open to changes on who qualifies
- Maintain a balance for robot performance and awards
- Maintain proportional split between regionals and districts
- Scalable based on the number of teams at *FIRST* Championship
- No additional qualification layers
- Qualify teams throughout the season, not all in Week 6
- No remote judging
- All teams who qualify get to compete with their robot
- No change to alliance structure or playoff format
- *FIRST* Impact Award (FIA) should basically be guaranteed qualification
    - The numerical target was a greater than 95% qualification rate for regional FIA winners
- Engineering Inspiration (EI) should be strongly correlated to qualification
    - The numerical target was a greater than 70% qualification rate for regional EI winners
- Align team incentives with a set of broad and robust measures of performance, instead of specific all-or-nothing outcomes
- Winning Alliance Captains should basically be guaranteed qualification
    - The numerical target was a greater than 95% qualification rate for regional Winning Alliance Captains
- Winning 1st pick should basically be guaranteed qualification
    - The numerical target was a greater than 95% qualification rate for regional Winning 1st picks
- Minimize the amount of luck involved in qualification
    - Qualification rates are consistently proportional to measurable performance. (Not a stepwise function)
- Lower the incentives to be the 24th robot, raise incentives to be the 3rd-6th robot

- ○ The numerical target was that Regional Finalists and 3rd place captains and 1st picks qualify at a rate higher than Regional Winning 2nd picks
- ● Equitable qualifying for team both early and late events.
  - ○ Teams shouldn't be playing only late for a higher chance of being a wildcard recipient
  - ○ Qualification rate at a given performance level should be consistent from week x to x+k
- ● The system should be intuitive and easy to understand

Advantages

Some advantages to this new model include:

- ● Maps to all established goals and targets
- ● Using points ensures qualification isn't tied to all or nothing outcomes
- ● Using the Regional Pool ensures teams are ranked based on consistent performances across events
- ● Using the Regional Pool allows teams to be ranked across events
- ● This model allows for majority weekly qualification
  - ○ At least 70% of teams qualify weekly based on current numbers
- ● Doesn't require complicated cutoff projections for the Regional Pool. Simply taking the top X teams after Interval Y is a cleaner than other options
- ● Provides future flexibility by tweaking spot allocations and adjusting point values

Data

While developing this model, analysis was performed to see which teams would qualify based on the current model and the new proposed model. The chart below compares the teams who attended the 2023 and 2024 *FIRST* Championship with the teams from each season who would have qualified using the Regional Points Model. It's important to note that in any given season there will be fluctuations in these qualification rates for each criteria.

Qualification Rates

Advancement Model Comparison - 2024		
Event Performance	**2024 Actual Attendance**	**Regional Points Model**
FIA Winners	100.0%	100.0%
EI Winners	98.4%	69.4%
RAS Winners	73.5%	30.6%
Winning Captains	100.0%	100.0%
Winning 1st Pick	100.0%	98.1%
Winning 2nd Pick	88.0%	36.0%
Finalist Captains	54.1%	95.1%
Finalist 1st Pick	47.5%	93.2%
Finalist 2nd Pick	35.5%	24.2%
3rd Place Captain	28.6%	67.9%
3rd Place 1st Pick	36.7%	65.0%
3rd Place 2nd Pick	13.6%	11.9%
Rookies	40	24
2nd Year Teams	3	8

Advancement Model Comparison - 2023		
Event Performance	2023 Actual Attendance	Regional Points Model
FIA Winners	100.0%	95.0%
EI Winners	98.3%	75.0%
RAS Winners	80.5%	31.7%
Winning Captains	98.1%	100.0%
Winning 1st Pick	100.0%	100.0%
Winning 2nd Pick	94.4%	40.7%
Finalist Captains	68.4%	94.7%
Finalist 1st Pick	58.6%	91.4%
Finalist 2nd Pick	31.0%	24.1%
3rd Place Captain	34.0%	79.2%
3rd Place 1st Pick	25.9%	64.8%
3rd Place 2nd Pick	29.3%	20.7%
Rookies	36	27
2nd Year Teams	6	6

Other considerations

This section covers other options that were considered, but ultimately not included in this new model.

- Scaling the direct event qualification spots by event size
  - Without reducing the minimum of 3 direct qualifying spots, this would reduce the amount of spots available for the Regional Pool
- Bonus points for teams competing within their region to disincentivize "poaching" spots from other regions
  - It was determined to be an unnecessary complexity, that wouldn't necessarily dissuade the behavior we were concerned about
- Allocating Regional Pool spots by region

- This was determined to be an unnecessary complexity after looking at data to see where teams are qualifying from.
- Note that the "Regional Pool" provides some amount of self-correction for regions that have high team counts and relatively low event counts because teams that didn't win the event are still eligible for championship slots via the Regional Pool

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why are the award points so different from the District Model?
   - The District Model has multiple layers of qualification so there are ways to reward a team's award performance beyond a slot at the *FIRST* Championship. The regional system does not have multiple layers, and we do not have the ability to add multiple layers of qualification or multiple layers of recognition for teams.
2. What happens when a team does not qualify for *FIRST* Championship, but earns the *FIRST* Impact Award (FIA) at a Regional?
   - *FIRST* is evaluating options that could allow teams who win the FIRST Impact Award and do not qualify for the *FIRST* Championship to still present for the award. More information will be shared on that decision at a later date.
3. Why does this proposal award slots at each event **and** qualify teams via a Regional Pool? Why not award more slots at each event?
   - The Regional Pool provides an opportunity to reward teams who perform well consistently but who finish just under the threshold for qualifying at a single event. A team that finishes as a finalist at two events is unlikely to qualify at either of those events but has a reasonable chance to qualify from the Regional Pool.
   - The Regional Pool also provides for some level of balancing of event sizes. By awarding fewer slots at each event, we dig less deep down the event roster and are able to reward the overall strongest teams across all events for their performance.
4. Why doesn't this model award points for events beyond 2 events? Why does it specifically focus on 2 events?
   - During the 2023 and 2024 seasons, approximately 94% of Regional teams attended 1 or 2 events. Looking at two events allows us to reward consistent performance over the season without being punitive to single-event teams.
   - By only using 2 events we can provide a fairly realistic estimation based on historic data for what a single-event team "should" have earned if they

attended a second event. Trying to provide a reasonable calculation to scale this beyond two events gets exponentially more complicated.
- It helps provide a balance for teams that have the resources to attend many events with teams who for a variety of reasons only have the ability to attend one event. Teams typically do better at subsequent events as they get more practice and iterate on their robot, while single-event teams may be either resource constrained, or their region may not have enough event slots to support multiple plays. Using two events as the baseline allows us to reward some level of improvement and consistency without penalizing single-event teams.

5. Does this model penalize teams who are unable to attend 2 events?
- Much of the qualification still happens within a single event, which is the strongest opportunity for a team to earn enough points to qualify for the *FIRST* Championship.
- Teams that attend only one event receive additional points using a linear function modeled on past events. For teams with a low to moderate number of points, this model estimates an improvement from event to event, whereas the model estimates a decrease for teams with a lot of points which aligns with historic behavior. The Regional Pool offers a competitive opportunity for both single and multiple event teams to qualify.
- Analysis was done on the percentage of teams qualifying based on the number of events they attended in 2024 and 2023 and while there are some changes, they were not drastic and didn't cause any concern.

Team Event Count Stats 2024			
Attended	Total	2024 Actual	Regional Points Model
1	888	6.4%	4.6%
2	811	21.8%	22.9%
3	113	54.9%	59.3%
4	4	25.0%	75.0%
5	0		
6	1	100.0%	100.0%

Team Event Count Stats 2023			
Attended	Total	2023 Actual	Regional Points Model
1	888	7.7%	7.0%
2	729	25.5%	25.5%
3	92	64.1%	70.7%
4	2	100.0%	100.0%
5	0		
6	1	100.0%	100.0%

6. What happens if a team declines their *FIRST* Championship invite at the event? Or from the Regional Pool?
   ○ If a team declines their slot, another team will be invited from the Regional Pool. This route allows teams to plan ahead by allowing teams who are on the cusp of getting an invite to start looking into planning to attend.
7. Is anything changing with the NASA grant for Engineering Inspiration since it will not have guaranteed qualification to *FIRST* Championship from Regional events in 2026?
   ○ *FIRST* is working directly with NASA on this and will provide an update once finalized.
8. How does this model need to change as Regionals increase or as *FIRST* Championship decreases?

   ○ This model is scalable. If the *FIRST* Championship were to get larger, direct event slots could increase from 3 to 4. If the event were to get smaller, direct event slots could decrease to 2. Award points would need to be reevaluated to confirm the percentages are still met.