

Chairman's Award - Team 4125

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2022 - Team 4125

Team Number

4125

Team Nickname

Confidential

Team Location

Umatilla, Oregon - USA

Describe the impact of the *FIRST* program on team participants within the last 3 years. This can include but is not limited to percentages of those graduating high school, attending college, in STEM careers, and in *FIRST* programs as mentors/sponsors.

To see the impact of FIRST on our alumni, in 2022 we analyzed data from alumni from the past three years and were inspired by what we found: 53% of our Alumni return to volunteer in FIRST. They help at various events and mentor our team. 100% of those seniors graduated from high school and 82.6% went on to college, with 73.6% pursuing a STEAM field. Confidential builds members who are ready to succeed in society, become the next STEAM leaders, and still remember to return and give back to us.

Describe your community along with how your team addresses its unique opportunities and circumstances.

Umatilla is in a rural area of Eastern Oregon. Our high school is 100% poverty and over 74% students of color. Umatilla serves the 2nd highest percentage of English Language Learners in Oregon. Our team has learned to adapt and develop the resources on which we thrive. We reach out to our alumni and connections across the nation to help us grow and that allows us to bring the resources we need to our community for our team, our families and our town. FIRST teaches us to rise and become leaders.

Describe the team's methods, with emphasis on the past 3 years, for spreading the FIRST message in ways that are effective, scalable, sustainable, and creative. How does your team measure results?

:"Big Dreams in Umatilla" is a documentary about our team's 2016 season that aired on public broadcasting in 2021. The film brought attention to the team and to FIRST. While this was exciting, we have a solid communication system in place with consistent social media, radio, and newspaper releases. In addition, we present regularly at conferences. In February of 2021 we were honored to present at our first national conference, AASA, to discuss college planning, and robotics, during a pandemic.

Please provide specific examples of how your team members act as role models within the FIRST community with emphasis on the past 3 years.

We are now the role models we once looked up to, we know that we must step up and do the same. We know we must set the culture for younger members, we abide by a strict Code of Conduct, which requires students to volunteer, act with honor, and show others the importance of FIRST. We share a shop with Team 8532 and work alongside them to instill the values of FIRST. We mentor numerous FLL and FTC teams, and run and host their events. We work diligently to model the behavior that represents FIRST.

Describe your team's initiatives to Assist, Mentor, and/or Start other *FIRST* teams with emphasis on activities within the past 3 years.

When we started out, FIRST was unknown throughout our region. Over time we started and regularly mentor 26 teams in our district K-12 from FLLJr-FRC. We also reach 100 students through classpacks. In addition, we also helped start and assist FIRST teams in nearby towns. Last year, the pandemic caused challenges with our student-mentor FLL and FTC model so we started FRC team 8532 "Classified." We are proud to have them competing in their second season this year.

Beyond starting teams, what initiatives have you done to help inspire young people to be science and technology leaders and innovators? What results have you seen from your efforts in the past 3 years?

When Amazon came to town, team members hosted visitors and advocated. We now have coding classes and internships sponsored by AWS as well as new equipment. At kickoff this year, two alums who finished the AWS internship and now work at Amazon came to support us. This year, we started an E-Sports team to show students the fun of tech, and lead them toward robotics.. The Umatilla Museum dedicated a section to our team. Students of all ages can see our history and know they can be part of it too.

Describe the partnerships you've created with other organizations (teams, sponsors, educational institutions, philanthropic entities, etc.) and what you have accomplished together with emphasis on the past 3 years

Our community is an important part of what our team stands for. While we have many local partnerships, perhaps our favorite is the honor bestowed upon us by the museum. Having our room in the museum is an incredible honor and we have alumni keeping our room updated so it is a constantly evolving presentation that reflects the Confidential of the past, and current team. Our impactful partnership for alumni has been with AWS. Through our co-developed internship, two alums now work there.

Describe your team's efforts in the past 3 years to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion within your team, *FIRST*, and your communities.

When recruiting students for our team, and building FRC 8532, we try to match the demographics of our school. We purposefully invite a diverse group of students to encourage under represented students to join. Many of our alums were on our all-girl FTC teams, Smarties and Nerdy Girls, when in middle school. When Classified began in 2021, it was an all-girls team and this gave students a chance to develop a variety of skills and encouraged female representation on their team, and ours.

Explain how you ensure your team and the initiatives you have created will continue to run effectively for the foreseeable future

Student leadership is essential in our team. It is our responsibility to plan ahead to ensure continued prosperity. Our succession plan will continue to honor the community, and the founding team members, long into the future. Team leads, and accountability for those leads, and project managers, work to preserve Confidential culture. This structure is replicated in, and also supports, our FLL and FTC teams as well as our second FRC team which are part of our sustainability plan.

Describe your team's innovative strategies to recruit, retain, and engage your sponsors within the past 3 years

The majority of our sponsors give less than \$50. Because of this, community service is essential for showing gratitude. During COVID, this wasn't possible so members of our team helped on meal delivery buses with our school district to deliver food to students and seniors in our community. We've shifted now to service days and shop days where people can bring their items in for tech help. Plex is our newest corporate sponsor and they are naming our robot this year as a token of our thanks.

Highlight one area in which your team needs to improve and describe the steps actively being taken to make those improvements.

The past 3 years, we graduated 28 seniors- leaving us with just 7 returning students. Recruiting during a pandemic, when we were not allowed in school was very hard. Having Classified as our Frosh team also means that we are limited to sophomores through seniors. These combined factors have caused a decrease in members. We believe that having our pathway running again, with FRC, FLL and FTC feeder programs that we run, will help us with growth; however, we must revive and grow our numbers again.

Describe your team's goals to fulfill the mission of *FIRST* and the progress you have made towards those goals.

FIRST is working to inspire the STEM leaders of tomorrow. Confidential is working to provide opportunities to show students STEAM fields. In our rural area, we often cannot see such careers but through FIRST, we are able to see, and interact with STEAM professionals. By working with our younger students in our FIRST teams, and supporting each other, we are building interest in FIRST and building the professional skills necessary to someday hold these positions and become leaders.

Briefly describe other matters of interest to the *FIRST* Judges, including items that may not fit into the above topics. The judges are interested in learning about aspects of your team that may be unique or particularly noteworthy.

Starting a new team during the pandemic was in direct response to COVID and needing to shift our FTC feeder model. We expected this to be a one-year solution to a temporary problem. While we are mentoring all 14 FTC teams again, we are also supporting FRC 8532. We're rebuilding Confidential post-COVID while also teaching Classified everything they need. It's stretched us to new limits and while we are thankful for the challenge and opportunity, we must acknowledge just how hard it's been.

Essay

The challenges of the past twenty-four months have created a supply-chain problem in Confidential: the students. We haven't been able to be there and our school and our robotics team have had to react to all the pandemic-induced changes rapidly. We were the first group quarantined in our community after exposure at the 2020 Spokane FRC event. Since sitting at home alone for days we've been forced to react and grow ever since. We have to react to who we are as a FIRST team and as students, and who we want to become. For a decade we have considered ourselves a team who knows how to overcome adversity but the pandemic brought a whole new level of challenge.

We were devastated that we couldn't deliver our 2021 robot, Echo, to compete with our friends across the PNW. We turned our pity party into action for others. Gus, a child from a nearby community with spina bifida, was on our radar. His mom sent the team a video a couple of years ago and asked if we could build a 4x4 bike so Gus could hike with his family. We formed a partnership with Gus and his family. We raised funds, got back into our shop, and finished his bike in fall of 2021. We will wait until the snow thaws to deliver the bike to Baker City so Gus can start to move rapidly.

In 2021 online school kept us apart and out of our shop for months. It was impossible to support our FLL and FTC teams. We didn't want to give up, but we knew we had to change. From the stress of the situation, Team 8532 "Classified," was born. When we could return, they worked alongside us to learn about competition and our love of robotics. This year, we're proud to be helping 8532 in their second season while we also restore our FTC teams. As we rebuild, it's been fun to see Classified grow into their own team and partner with us to become a unified Umatilla Robotics.

Starting Classified was just one of our creative reactions to strengthen our team when everything felt taken away. Students who missed out on FTC classes in middle school because of the pandemic assumed that we were the "same old" robotics they've experienced since they entered elementary school. We had to figure out a way to show them that technology is always interesting, fun, and rapidly changing. Four of our members presented to, and earned permission from, our school board to start an E-Sports team. The group is both Confidential members and non-robotics students, but we overlap practice times to show them robotics in action. We helped raise their start-up funds, built their computers, and set up their space in our shop. A new group of students get to react to the robotics around them. It will be our best recruiting tool yet, because it created a team that no one knew we needed.

For over a decade, Confidential has sustained a continuum of FIRST in our community. We help write grants, and work in the STEAM Academy of Umatilla After-School Program to support STEAM interest and FIRST for students throughout our district. We help mentor 14 FTC, 12 FLL, as well as 40 students in FLL and 60 FLLJr students through classpacks. Through modeling the values of FIRST with the system that our alumni created when they mentored us, we make sure that the after-school program continues to supply us with new members. In the 2020 season as well as 2022 we run and host the Umatilla FTC Qualifier.

COVID forced all learning to be online and we'd graduated 17 seniors in two years leaving Confidential with an uncertain future. While we're open to change, we must remain Confidential at our core. Culture begins with each member and is modeled throughout the team. We focus on improving each other during team activities and encourage our members to be involved in many clubs and sports to supply the ideals of FIRST throughout the school. Our Code of Conduct is based on the principles of gracious professionalism and we monitor it through self-evaluation and team-lead feedback. The Code is a set of guidelines showing our team members how to represent themselves. We want people to think of Confidential as a service-oriented team, who communicates well, values others, and dances our way through stress.

Advocacy has long been a value of Confidential. Without U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley, our team would not exist today. He was crucial in helping our superintendent envision how we could create and support a robotics team in an area known for a lack of resources. We have met with him annually since our team's inception and have hosted both his and the U.S. Senator Ron Wyden's town hall meetings. At a 2020 town hall for Sen. Merkley, Confidential Team members were honored to ask the first and last questions and we got a few minutes to visit with him privately. In 2021, his town hall went virtual, we still got to be part of the show and were again asked to start and end his event with questions. We are thankful for the continued support of amazing leaders and appreciate their willingness to serve as role models.

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Working to secure support for FIRST is important but law makers and school leaders across the nation need to know why FIRST matters. In the fall of 2019, we presented at the Oregon School Boards Association Conference. This was a great way to help board members and superintendents understand why they should support FIRST. We hope that these efforts will ensure that FIRST is not just a resource in our community, but a resource that's spread throughout Oregon. COVID limited our ability to advocate in person but it taught us in online school how to use our voices virtually. In fall of 2020, we were honored when one of our members was asked to be on a student panel for the first-ever virtual OSBA conference to speak to school board members statewide. In February of 2021, two members of Confidential virtually joined Superintendent Sipe at a National Superintendent's conference where we spoke in a session about college planning and robotics during a pandemic. With the rise of virtual conferences due to the pandemic, we were able to broaden our audience from the state to the national level. We shared our experiences with superintendents across the country and encouraged them to bring FIRST to their schools as well.

Resources are scarce in our community and we've had to work through this challenge. Our school district serves one of the poorest student populations in the state and has the second highest percentage of English Language Learners in Oregon. It has been hard to find corporate support, but our community has always helped us think around challenges. We were excited to present to Amazon in February of 2019. They built many data centers in our community and we wanted to add them to the Confidential family. Hosting them has led to coding classes and internships sponsored by AWS as well as new equipment and technology for our shop. Our 2021 robot, Echo, was named after our friends at AWS! This year, Plex is our new major sponsor and they will name our bot.

We are honored to have Amazon's support; but the incredible moral support we've received from our community is invaluable. To thank them, we traditionally volunteer at least one Saturday per month. We prioritize needs, divide our team members, recruit help as needed and headed out to serve. In prior years, we have run STEAM Saturdays at the public library, put together food baskets at the fire station, wrapped presents for children in need, served meals, and done many, many hours of yard work. We love the opportunity to give back and believe that service is a great way to model our core values and introduce new people to FIRST. Last year, we weren't allowed to be in the community due to COVID concerns so we had to react. Members of the team joined the school district meal delivery buses and delivered food to students and senior citizens in the community. We've opened up our shop on Saturdays and people in the community can bring in their phones, laptops and tech questions to us for help. This solution allows us to share our expertise and give back in new ways. We're thankful for the chance to still show our gratitude.

Years ago, Dean Kamen challenged us to "make it loud." We work hard to fulfill this challenge by updating social media, our website, and delivering consistent press releases. When the school year started online our FLL elementary students felt like life had been turned upside down and they didn't know how to react. With our mentor Mrs. Sipe and an elementary friend, Alan, we filmed a how-to-video for the school district website to help train parents and students how to navigate online learning.

In 2015, we were shocked when Blue Chalk media reached out and asked to make a documentary about our team. They followed us for the entire 2016 season and beyond and the final film was released on Oregon Public Broadcasting in January of 2021 and nationally in the fall. "Big Dreams in Umatilla" is available for viewing by anyone in the nation and we hope it helps inspire others who face challenges to recognize their ability to overcome obstacles and achieve their dreams through FIRST.

As we think about the various ways we have been impacted by FIRST, and the ways FIRST has allowed us to impact our community, perhaps the biggest compliment to both FIRST and Confidential comes from the senior citizens who run our town museum. Last year, they dedicated an entire room to Team Confidential. They told us that there have been moments in Umatilla's history that changed the town forever: the McNary Dam being raised, the interstate being built, and robotics coming to our town. We can think of no greater compliment to our team and the FIRST community that we will have a dedicated room in the museum. Generations of students will experience the history of our team and hopefully see themselves as the future of Confidential and be ready to respond and react to any challenge.