

FIRST Impact Award - Team 34

2025 - Team 34
Team Number
34
Team Nickname
Rockets
Team Location
Athens, AL - USA
Describe the impact of the <i>FIRST</i> program on team participants within the last 3 years. Think about percentages of those graduating high school, attending college, in STEM careers, leadership skills, and serving as mentors/sponsors in <i>FIRST</i> programs.
Within the past three years 100% of our students have graduated from high school and are currently pursuing a degree in STEM or Education. This is up 97.7% compared to our county's college enrollment rate of 2.3%. Our students also receive great scholarships. A 2023 graduate is currently attending the University of AL in Huntsville (UAH) on a full-ride Department of Defense Scholarship. Another graduate is attending UAH with full tuition reimbursement from Lockheed Martin.
Describe your community along with its unique opportunities and circumstances. Think about your geographic region, diversity of town/school, language barriers, socioeconomic barriers, and cultural expectations.
Our team is based in a very rural county. All of the large engineering companies are headquartered in the neighboring county and they often choose to sponsor teams based there. This means that our students have to work harder to gain sponsorships. Along with this our small and underfunded school district is not able to make any monetary donations to our team. We also don't have the luxury of meeting during school or even right after since our team has members from many different areas.
Describe the team's methods, with emphasis on the past 3 years, for spreading the <i>FIRST</i> Mission in ways that are effective, scalable, sustainable, and creative.
Within the past 3 years our team has participated in 7 STEM camps. Last year we ran 3 "Mini STEM Camps" at a local TitleIelementary school. Our team hosted our 2nd annual 4th & 5th Grade Lego Robotics Camp and our Taylor Swift themed Girls in STEAM camp this summer. This summer we also partnered with our school to do a Middle School ESL Camp and a Middle School Lego Robotics Camp. Plans for all of these camps are going to be in our Impact Guidebook so we can recreate them in the future.
Describe your team's goals and the progress you have made towards them to fulfill <i>FIRST's</i> Vision.
Three years ago our team made two main goals for the future. The first goal was to have a robotics program at each school in Limestone County. In order to do this we met with the school board and

started 6 Middle School Robotics Clubs. Our second goal was to help a community in Zimbabwe that struggles to irrigate their crops. Since then we have developed STEM and agriculture learning materials for them and are hosting a benefit dinner to raise \$5,000 for them to drill a community well.

What impact has your team seen from your efforts described in the above question? How does your team measure impact?

Since setting and reaching our team's goal of having robotics programs at each LCS school, our team has noticed a spike in STEM interest throughout the county. Since our initial meeting, Limestone County has gone from a single robotics team to 3 robotics teams, 6 robotics clubs, 7+ STEM summer camps and an annual robotics expo. Our team benefits from these programs. Within 3 years we have had 14 students from these younger clubs, teams, and camps feed into our team which is creating a pipeline.

Please provide specific examples of how your team and team members act as role models within the *FIRST* community with emphasis on the past 3 years. How do you share these best practices with other teams?

As the oldest team in Alabama we work hard to be a team people can look up to. This is why we volunteer at almost every FIRST event in the state. We also work with the FIRST in AL Youth Advisory Council to start new teams and insure that older teams are taken care of. In addition we work to advocate on a state and national level in hopes of encouraging other teams to do the same. We are also readily available to assist any team and have assisted over 15 teams within the past 3 years.

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

This year our team started FTC Team 26201 Soarin and have been mentoring FLL Team 67921 Robotic Lions. Last year our team hosted FRC Team 6404 Brazilian Storm so they could rebuild their robot in our facility. We also assisted FRC team 7717 Steampunks from the Dominican Republic by allowing them to ship their robot to our school. Our team hosted these teams the week of the Rocket City Regional. Being able to host two teams from two countries at the same time was a great experience for our team.

What other initiatives have you created, grown, sustained, or participated in (*FIRST* or otherwise) to help inspire young people to be science and technology leaders and innovators? What outcomes have you seen from your efforts in the past 3 years?

Our team is a proud advocate for increased student leadership on FRC and FTC teams. Last year we became part of the StudentsFIRST initiative to help raise awareness of the dangers of mentor over involvement. We have since spread the mission of StudentsFIRST to over 300 teams around the world. Last year we also joined the M.E FIRST initiative. Through this initiative, we provide various menstrual products at each regional we participate in.

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

Our team has participated in many projects in partnership with a local philanthropy group, TRAIL. These projects include monthly downtown cleanups, volunteering at our local Family Resource Center, and volunteering at Empty Bowls, a fundraiser that supports our local homeless population. We have also built relationships with our sponsor, National Space Club. Since connecting with them last year, they have donated \$2000+ to our team and awarded one of our mentors the Educator of the Year award.

Describe your team's efforts in the past 3 years to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion within your team, <i>FIRST</i>, and your communities.	
We are no stranger to diversity and socioeconomic challenges. Our team is 23% female, 15% POC, 11% of our students have an intellectual disability and 66% of our students suffer from poverty or unique family circumstances. We require students to pay \$500 to the team each year. However in order to ensure lower income students are included, our team allows students to have this fee sponsored by local businesses. This means that we rarely have students decide to pay this out of pocket.	
Explain how you ensure your team and the initiatives you have created will be sustainable.	
Our team believes that sustainability is the most important part of our impact. To ensure our initiatives are sustainable we are working to create an "Impact Guidebook". This book will detail how we run each of our camps, the process of our outreach events, our recruitment presentations and events, and the how-to of every aspect of our Impact subteam. This sustainability book will be finished by our first competition and we will also be publishing it to our website for other teams to access.	
Highlight one area in which your team needs to improve and describe the steps actively being taken to make those improvements.	
In the past our team has struggled to work together. We have realized that it's hard for different sub teams to mesh together during build season. In order to improve this our team has been working on strengthening our student leadership and their relationships with each other. We realize that they are the examples on our team and if they work together well the rest of the team will follow. Our leaders meet often to talk and eat meals together in order to grow deeper friendships.	
Briefly describe other matters of interest to the <i>FIRST</i> 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, particularly noteworthy, or had a large impact.	
We bring local leaders and our local school board to the Rocket City Regional each year. We also run the FIRST in AL Youth Advisory Council. Last summer we attended the SASA National Advocacy Conference in Washington DC. On this trip one of our members was able to speak to the offices of both senators and all 7 representatives' offices to increase STEM funding in Alabama. We were the first group from Alabama to ever attend this conference.	
Judge Feedback	
	This team did not submit the optional question for the judges when entering their submission. An area the team has an opportunity to improve. Something that really impressed the judges.
Essay	
As Alabama's oldest team, our focus is to make waves throughout our community, state, and beyond. Our team of twenty-seven members is made up of students from nine schools with half of those schools receiving TitleIfunding. For the past twenty-nine years, Team 34 has used small teams of students from drastically different backgrounds to truly strengthen our community.	

Within the past three years, our team has reached 123,000 people through outreach and social media. Our reach has consistently increased annually for the past three years which is crucial for our team to have a lasting impact. Our team has achieved this reach through over 150 outreach and volunteering events. With these events, we have made some amazing connections throughout our community. Each year we partner with the Athens Farmers Market to do a children's activity at their market. After doing this two years in a row we have built relationships with the people of the market. We have become "the team from the farmers market" when people recognize us at other events. In the past, we partnered with Eli's Block Party Childhood Cancer Foundation to plan their annual Superhero Day. This event raised over \$4,000 the two years that we participated in it. However, the foundation has decided to focus on different projects which allows us to do the same.

Our team participates in the annual Ardmore Crape Myrtle festival reaching 2500+ people. This year we also demonstrated our robot at the Ardmore Tractor Pull, the North AL Zoo Society's Kids Festival, Trash Panda Baseball's STEM Night, and Doomsday Haunted Attraction. These events reached 10,000 people. We also work to build relationships with our sponsors. For the past two years, we have presented at the AUVSI Pathfinder Symposium, an engineering event in Huntsville. We also recently built a strong relationship with the National Space Club in Huntsville, in the last year after they congratulated our Dean's List Finalist. Since then they have sponsored our trips to Worlds and SASA, awarded one of our mentors with the Educator of the Year, and had us present at one of their monthly breakfasts.

Volunteering is very important to us because we believe that our purpose as a team is to serve others. We use this mentality to encourage our members to volunteer at local events. As a result, our team members have a combined total of 2,800+ community service hours. These hours come from local events including Empty Bowls, a fundraiser that raises over \$10,000 annually to support our local homeless community and Camp Hope, a summer camp that provides support for grieving children. We also volunteer at events like Athens Sippin' Cider Festival, Athens Kiddie Carnival, and the Limestone County Foster Program Christmas Party.

We also do larger service projects. Last year our team did a clothing drive during the Rocket City Regional which collected over 400 articles of clothing that we donated to our local Family Resource Center and Downtown Rescue Mission. We are currently working on our biggest service project, The Zimbabwe Project. A few years ago one of our mentors visited Zimbabwe.. He connected with members of a drought-prone community that struggles to irrigate their crops. In order to help this community, our team reconnected with them and developed STEM and Agriculture learning materials for them to provide to their local school. The final phase of this project is to host a banquet to raise money. This money will allow them to irrigate their crops and feed their community. Our Zimbabwe Banquet will be in February and our goal is to raise \$5,000 through tickets and a silent auction.

Our team members have a total of 500+ hours volunteering in FIRST-related programs. While volunteering and doing service projects within our community is a huge focus, it is also important for us to volunteer throughout the FIRST Community. This includes our support of seven Alabama FTC and FLL events within the past two years. This also includes our yearly support of the Rocket City Regional (RCR). We have students volunteer as safety glasses table attendants, student ambassadors, and we help disassemble the field each year. We will also be helping to run the 2025 FLL AL State Championship because one of our students is the Assistant Tournament Director and we will also have several students volunteering there.

Aside from volunteering at competitions we also start, assist, and mentor many teams. In 2023, our team hosted FRC Team 6404 Brazilian Storm to rebuild their robot in our facility after transporting it. Last year we invited them back, while they were here we learned more about their culture and in return, we introduced them to the City of Athens Mayor, Ronnie Marks. We have made amazing connections with this team and communicate with them regularly. In addition to assisting Team 6404, last year we also assisted Team 7717 Steampunks from the Dominican Republic by allowing them to ship their robot to our school prior to the RCR. This meant that both Team 6404 and Team 7717 were at our school on the same day preparing for the regional. The ability to host two teams from two different parts of the world at the same time was truly a remarkable experience for our team.

This year we started the first FTC team in Limestone County (LCS) Team 26201 Soarin. While this team isn't competing this year they are working to prepare for next year. We have also mentored FLL team 32309 The Skyrockets and currently mentor FLL Team 67921 Robotic Lions from Lindsay Lane Christian Academy. In addition, our team has also continued to work with our six Limestone County Middle School Robotics Clubs. These are after-school clubs where teachers are paid to teach students how to build with Spike Prime Robot kits. Our team actively mentors each of these clubs in hopes of them one day becoming FLL teams.

In addition to this, our team makes STEM and FIRST-related camps a big priority. Five years ago Team 34 hosted one camp a summer only as a fundraiser. This year, we hosted a total of seven camps: one as a fundraiser, and six to ensure equal access to STEM in our community. Our three Mini Camps were hosted during the spring semester last year. All three of these were hosted at Blue Springs Elementary School, a local Title I school, and included spike prime building, STEM competitions, and rocket launches.

We also hosted our 2nd annual 4th and 5th Grade Lego Robotics Camp Fundraiser. This camp hosted 22 students, with over 40 family members who attended our closing ceremony. Our 2nd camp of the summer was the 3rd annual LCS Middle School Robotics Camp. This camp is put on by LCS due to our advocacy for FIRST-related programs. Three years ago our team met with LCS Administration to help them start the Middle School Robotics Clubs and a four-day long summer camp. Our team also volunteers at it and presents on the last day.

Our last two camps were meant specifically to include students who do not normally have access to STEM. In partnership with the Limestone County Career Tech School, we hosted an ESL Robotic Tractor Pull. This camp allowed middle school ESL students to build, program, and compete with VEX robots. Our team also hosted an "In My STEAM Era" Girls in STEAM Camp. This Taylor Swift-themed camp hosted six to ten-year-old girls with a number of STEAM activities.

Our Lego Clubs, FLL/FTC teams, and camps are creating a pipeline of students for our team. Within the past four years, we have had fourteen of these students join our team. To recruit them, our team brings a spirit bus with all of our programs and the LCS gifted program to the RCR. This allows eligible students to meet our team, ask questions, and get submerged in the fun of competition. While our pipeline and spirit bus bring in the majority of our students, we have additional recruitment strategies. Each year our team gives recruitment presentations to eligible students at every school in LCS. We invite all of these students to our annual Tough Truck Challenge. This is a recruitment day where students are challenged to design, build and program VEX robots to compete in a tractor pull competition.

Aside from advocating for students to join our team, there is a much larger side of advocacy. Our team advocates for student-led teams and menstrual equity at competition by participating in the StudentsFIRST and M.E FIRST Initiatives. We also advocate for the growth of FIRST in AL by working with the FIRST in Alabama Youth Advisory Council (YAC). This group is made up of members from FTC and FRC teams throughout AL and works to support AL teams and start new ones. Aside from leading growth by starting teams, the YAC has recently started to increase its advocacy. This summer one of our team leaders, who is also the YAC President, attended the Student Association of STEM Advocacy Conference (SASA) in DC. This gave her the opportunity to speak to all of the AL Senators offices and all seven of the AL Representatives offices including Dale Strong who is the Athens/Huntsville Representative. During these meetings the group proposed three bills/markups to increase FIRST, VEX, and STEM funding throughout Alabama.

While everything that our team has achieved within the five years is extraordinary, it's nothing if our impact is not sustainable. Our team is currently working on a large "Impact Guidebook" full of camp plans, outreach contacts, and the how-to of every aspect of our team's impact. Before the end of this build season, our team will have the ability to make waves in our community for years to come with the help of this guidebook. Our team has improved drastically within the past few years and we cannot wait to see the tidal wave of impact we can make in the future. ;

