Judging the *FIRST*® Impact Award

FIRST® has divided outreach activities into 3 areas. Teams should not be penalized if they choose not to discuss a topic on this list. This is not a comprehensive list but is intended to spark ideas for the judges when reviewing submissions and interviewing teams. Consider utilization of team resources, especially when comparing large teams vs small teams and focus on how teams sustain their activities. In short, what did they accomplish with the resources available to them?

Words that are bolded and italicized are the FIRST Impact Award Definitions. Please ensure teams are aware of the definitions and are using them correctly, see the [FIRST Impact Award Definitions](#) (updated for 2026 season!).

Spreading the *FIRST* Mission	Impact on the *FIRST* community	Inspiring the STEM Future
Starting *FIRST*® LEGO® League, *FIRST*® Tech Challenge, and/or *FIRST*® Robotics Competition teams - Consider the teams' direct impact on the new teams - Ask if the teams are still in place and sustainable - Ask where the funds came from, if they still support the team and how, etc. - Local volunteerism - Demonstrations and presentations about *FIRST* to the community ***Reaching*** people who are not familiar with *FIRST*	***Mentoring*** *FIRST* LEGO League, *FIRST* Tech Challenge, and/or *FIRST* Robotics Competition teams - If not stated, ask what they do to help these teams ***Host*** or ***Support*** *FIRST* events ***Host*** or ***Support*** off-season events ***Provided Public Resources*** (Creating documents, presentations, or other resources to help other teams) ***Host*** or ***Support*** workshops for other *FIRST* teams	- Impact of team on *FIRST* participants - Increased interest in STEM - Increased number of college bound students - New life skills, (i.e., time management, problem solving, communication and teamwork) - Helping create science & technology curriculum for your school - Creating awareness in the community around STEM - Engaging in ***Advocacy.*** - Be sure you understand the role the team played in advocacy. Did they organize an advocacy opportunity or were they participating in an event planned by other teams? - Helping other non-*FIRST* STEM based programs

Suggested Questions (if needed - ask for specific examples):

- How did you further STEM and the *FIRST* mission in your school or community this season?
- How were you able to connect with the community this season?
- How did you manage to ensure a sustainable program with sponsors?
- How does your team ensure info and training is passed on to each year's new members?
- Describe a program from previous years that you have been able to continue this year
- If your team overcame a challenge, what did they learn from it?
- If you could start the season over, what would you or your team do differently?
- How do you engage and support your sponsors?

How to Narrow Down the List

- Information in the essays should be used to distinguish the outstanding teams.
  - Compare data carefully - it is not apples and oranges: there are large teams, small teams, well financed team teams, struggling teams, etc.
  - Evaluate their impact on the total number of people engaged through their efforts
  - Watch out for claimed outreach activities that are older. Team success stories should be within the past 2 – 3 years. What have they done recently? If the timeline is not clear, ask about it during Q&A.
    - Evaluate the sustainability of each outreach activity.
    - Outreach that is done repeatedly year over year and is successful for the community are still worthy activities.
  - Be cautious of hard luck stories. It's ok to have challenges, but the team needs to articulate how they overcame it to achieve a goal or successful outreach. What did they learn from it?
  - Avoid evaluation of teams based on "social objectives."
    - This term can be a reminder that judges should avoid inserting personal opinions or desired goals into the evaluation process. It's not the role of the judges to evaluate the social efficacy of a particular outreach initiative, or to promote a particular outreach tactic. The judges' role is to consider the effectiveness (impacts) of the team's outreach on achieving the goals of *FIRST*, as articulated in the award criteria.
    - Judges should not try to 'send a message' by recognizing teams that may be from underserved communities. Teams should be evaluated based on the award criteria and their success, given their available resources.
  - Year over year program improvements and growth are great. It's okay to change programs based on the interests of the current team.
- Presentation
  - Are they gracious and professional?
  - Does the presentation enhance the data provided in their essays? Is the presentation consistent with statements made in the essay?
  - Is it compelling? Do you feel inspired?
- If teams have equal impact, those who work with *FIRST* programs rise to the top.
- After Judges deliberate and have their shortlist of top contenders, Judges can use the [*FIRST* Impact Award Documentation Form](#) to verify team's claims (now in the team's submission)

  A team does not have to have the FIRST Impact Award Documentation form, but it does help show to the judges that they are using the correct terminology and offers proof of the activities.

FIRST Impact Award Feedback

Judges fill out feedback for every team that interviews at an event and enter it into the *FIRST* Impact Award Judge Portal which is shared with the team **48 hours after the event**. Each feedback must be 500 characters or less and answer:

1. An area the team has an opportunity to improve,
2. Something that really impressed the judges, and
3. A team submitted question (this question varies by team - see the last executive summary).
   a. Questions asking what is required to win or inappropriate questions should be answered with "Did not follow guidelines".
   b. If you can't answer the question, it's okay to say you don't know.

> **Reminder!** Feedback must be entered into the judge portal within **48** hours as the feedback will be automatically shared with the team after that time. This timing was put into place to ensure teams receive timely feedback so they can make edits to their presentation if desired.

Keep in mind, **the feedback should help and inspire.** Here are a few tips:
- Goals of Feedback:
  - Make the team feel listened to
  - Suggest helpful, practical ways to improve
  - Inspire more outreach and participation
- Think about what was memorable? Or something you would have liked to have learned.
- Judges only provide feedback on what they learn from the submission **and/or** from the interview.
- *Use Proactive language* - Be constructive and encouraging. Judges should avoid 'brutely honest' feedback. The judge role is to provide general guidance on potential areas of improvement.
- *Give Helpful Advice* - Provide teams with what the judges believe they did well or what may help them improve. Remember, judging is subjective, and feedback should carry to the next interview when possible. Don't assume that a team has the resources– use "if possible", "try", "consider".
- *Address Specific Outreach Activities* – Provide feedback oriented around a specific team activity.
- *Skills or Knowledge* - Addresses a specific skill or knowledge that was used or could have been.
- *"I noticed…"* - To reference examples of specific positive actions, use the phrase "I noticed you did … And that went well." to acknowledge efforts and make a positive performance connection.
- Be mindful not to make the same suggestions for numerous teams. Be specific to their impact.
- The *FIRST* Impact Award is not a checklist of did they do everything, but did they do their impact well. Focus on their specific efforts.

Here are some Examples:

Answer Rating	Question	Provided Feedback	Explanation for Rating
Very Helpful	An Area the team has an opportunity to improve	To ensure the continued success of [team], please consider succession plans for leadership and project management roles. Also, it is important to ensure that all of your team's numerous efforts are sustainable and that information is shared so that succession planning is secured. An additional consideration could be the establishment of a recruitment pathway to involve more female (identifying) and aboriginal participants.	Provides feedback as well as suggested ways for improvement.
Helpful	**Submitted Question**: From our submission last year, we learned a lot through trial and error, which we feel has improved our submission process for this year. As a judge, what advice would you give for [team] to continue to improve our submission?	Explain more about "how" and "why" your team does things. How did you decide to update your team model to improve your team's sustainability? How did you get involved in your community's events, and why did you choose those particular events to attend?	This feedback is specific, actionable, and relevant to the submission
Helpful	An Area the team has an opportunity to improve?	Track the impact of your *FIRST* activities on participants, school, and community at large. Find activities that provide positive outcomes that you can measure.	Provides specific ways to improve the team's processes AND their submission.
Not Helpful	Something that really impressed the judges?	We think this is an amazing team with tremendous potential.	Feedback does not answer the question.
Not Helpful	**Submitted Question**: We find it very hard to decide which activities and programs get mentioned for the Impact Award, and which get cut. Is there anything we spend too much or not enough time on - or that we shouldn't mention at all?	We enjoyed reading [team's] essay about the team accomplishments over the years.	Feedback did not align with question.

FIRST

FIRST ROBOTICS COMPETITION