Starting versus Joining a FIRST Lego League Team

Washington State has between 550 and 600 FIRST Lego League teams each year. Teams are formed in schools, community organizations and neighborhoods. They can be formed by any interested adult willing to facilitate the team logistics for about 4 months.

Both nationwide and within Washington, about 77% (~460) of the FIRST Lego League (FLL) teams are formed through schools, so the first place to check regarding joining an existing team is with the school that your child attends. Generally, the school based teams are open only to students attending that institution since the interest often exceeds the available slots. If your child’s school does not currently have a team, you may want to work with a teacher or administrator there to help form a team within the school. Resources regarding forming a new team can be found at the end of this document.

About 9% (~50) of the Washington teams are formed through community organizations such as 4-H, YMCA, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, or Girls and Boys Clubs. Generally, this is only one activity out of many that the particular organization facilitates for its members, but if your child is interested in one of these organizations overall, this might be an avenue to pursue in your local area.

The remaining 14% (~80) of teams in Washington are formed through homeschool groups, religious organizations or neighborhood groups of friends. While these groups are not specifically closed to other students, they do not usually engage in recruiting members, so they are a difficult source to count on for someone to find a team spot.

Since it is so difficult or rare to find an open spot on an existing team in just the right location, many experienced coaches and parents advise families new to the program to start their own team. This can be very frustrating and daunting advice for parents new to the programs in FIRST. Unfortunately, for the interested student, this may be the only guaranteed option to participate in a truly wonderful opportunity. With this in mind, both US FIRST and Washington FIRST Robotics provide several resources for new coaches and parents to form a new team.

Resources for Mentors, Coaches and Parents:

On both the national FIRST webpage and the local Washington FIRST Robotics webpage are resources for FIRST Lego League with specific information regarding starting a new team including budget estimates and a basic timeline. Some of the information on these links is in process of updating this summer as the new season will begin in late August. Links to get started are here:

http://www.firstlegoleague.org/challenge/startateam  (US FIRST info)

http://www.firstwa.org/Programs/FIRSTLegoLeague/StartingaTeam/Quick.aspx  (QuickStart version)

http://www.firstwa.org/Programs/FIRSTLegoLeague/StartingaTeam/Indepth.aspx  (InDepth version)

Mentors and Coaches for the team: At the above websites are suggestions for appropriate Coaches and Mentors for a team. Please read the guidelines on these sites because a person does not need to know
all about robotics in order to be an effective coach for a FIRST Lego League team. In addition to the resources listed above, many high school robotics teams – called the FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC) teams are interested in mentoring FIRST Lego League teams as part of their community outreach. On the Washington FIRST Robotics website is a map of FRC teams. Contacting one of these teams in your area may provide additional resources to assist in running an FLL team. Team Map: [http://www.firstwa.org/Programs/FIRSTRoboticsCompetition/TeamMap.aspx](http://www.firstwa.org/Programs/FIRSTRoboticsCompetition/TeamMap.aspx)

On the main FIRST site ([www.usfirst.org](http://www.usfirst.org)), there is a webpage set up to connect interested students with open teams for FIRST Lego League and Jr. FIRST Lego League. The TeamUp system is setup to help connect students and teams. Specific data on the success rate of this program is difficult to determine, but the option is here to try: [https://my.usfirst.org/FIRSTPortal/login/fc_login.aspx?s=fc](https://my.usfirst.org/FIRSTPortal/login/fc_login.aspx?s=fc)

Forums on both the main FIRST site as well as an email Yahoo group for Washington State exist for Coaches, Parents and Mentors to ask questions of others.

The FIRST Forums are located at: [http://forums.usfirst.org/forum.php](http://forums.usfirst.org/forum.php)

The Yahoo FIRST Lego League Group for Washington is called WAFLL. This is a restricted group limited to those with interest in the Washington program. The link to join is: [https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/WAFLL/info](https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/WAFLL/info)

Washington FIRST Robotics (WFR) is the nonprofit organization responsible for partnering with the international FIRST organization to support programs in the state of Washington. The main website for WFR is [www.firstwa.org](http://www.firstwa.org). For the upcoming year, Washington FIRST Robotics will be facilitating or running about 175 events supporting and promoting all of the FIRST programs for K-12 students. Some of the events planned for this upcoming fall include New Coach training for FIRST Lego League coaches, Coaches Coffee for networking with other FLL coaches, and Event Coordinator training for those people responsible for running competition events for FLL. Between December and January, the FLL teams in Washington will have the opportunity to participate in competition qualifier events as a culmination of their season. These events are run entirely by volunteers which is another avenue for parents and family to participate in the program.

Washington FIRST Robotics has adopted the mission of FIRST which is: *To inspire young people to be science and technology leaders, by engaging them in exciting mentor-based programs that build science, engineering and technology skills, that inspire innovation, and that foster well-rounded life capabilities including self-confidence, communication, and leadership*

While it is extremely daunting to contemplate starting a new FIRST Lego League team, the benefits to your student and for those that have an opportunity to participate are wonderful and well worth the effort. If you need additional resources or encouragement, please don’t hesitate to contact us at Washington FIRST Robotics. I hope this information has been both helpful and encouraging.

Best Regards,
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Updated 6/2015