

Belonging

the newsletter from the *FIRST* NC ED&I Team – August 2026

Equity – Treating everyone fairly, having equal opportunities and removing barriers.

Diversity – The way we are all different.

Inclusion – Creating space for everyone where differences are embraced.

Recruitment

Recruiting new members is about more than growing your roster—it's about building a team where every student feels like they belong. While robot demonstrations, outreach events, and word of mouth can spark interest, students often stay because they find a welcoming environment where they feel valued. Remember that *FIRST* offers opportunities for a wide range of interests, including engineering, programming, business, media, marketing, outreach, and leadership.

One of the best ways to build that environment is by getting to know your students beyond their role on the team. Learn about their interests, strengths, goals, and what motivates them. Team-building activities, shared meals, icebreakers, and social events create opportunities for students to form friendships and build trust away from the robot. Belonging isn't just about being on the team—it's about building relationships that make students want to stay. This also provides the understanding that retention comes from relationships, not just recruitment.

An inclusive team also creates opportunities for everyone to contribute. Not every student will have the same experience level or strengths, but everyone should have meaningful ways to participate and grow. Encouraging collaboration and recognizing different perspectives helps create a stronger team on and off the field.

Setting clear expectations from the beginning helps create a positive team culture. Establish shared values such as respect, accountability, communication, and gracious professionalism, and encourage mentors and student leaders to model those behaviors consistently. When expectations are clear, students understand how they can contribute to the team's success.

A successful team isn't measured only by competition results, but by the community it builds. When students feel welcomed, supported, and empowered to grow, they are more likely to remain involved, develop leadership skills, and inspire future members. Investing in recruitment, inclusion, and team culture today helps ensure a stronger, more sustainable *FIRST* team for years to come.

How do you and your team make members, coaches and mentors feel they belong? Do you have tips for other teams on how to include people and help them feel they really belong?

Send them to FIRSTNC-EDI@googlegroups.com

From *FIRST*: Just in case you missed it! – Pre-order scoring elements

This season we're again partnering with AndyMark to offer pre-orders for scoring elements for BIOCORE™ presented by Haas.

Pre-orders are started, June 8th on the AndyMark website. Two quantity types will be [sold for pre-order purchase](#): the Kickoff Kit of Parts quantity (am-5901_kop), and partial (1/5) field quantity (am-5901_partial).

Teams can order as many of each as they'd like to meet their team needs and budget. For example, a team that wants a full field of scoring elements can purchase 5x of the partial field quantity. We are intentionally not specifying the number of scoring elements included in each quantity.

Holidays and Events:

August 1 – Sandcastle Day. A playful reminder that strong teams, like strong structures, need a solid foundation.

August 6 - Wiggle Your Toes Day. Today is the day to give your little piggy toes some exercise.

August 8 – International Cat Day. Created in 2002 help cats and teach people how to care for them.

August 9 – Book Lovers Day. Dedicated to reading, literature, and supporting local bookstores and libraries

August 10 – International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples. Celebrate Indigenous cultures, knowledge, languages, and contributions.

August 10 – National S’mores Day. A good excuse for a relaxed team social or new-member welcome night.

August 12 – International Youth Day. Highlights the UN theme “Different Contexts, Common Aspirations,” emphasizing young people’s shared goals for dignity, inclusion, and a sustainable future.

August 13 – International Left-Handers Day. Celebrates left-handers and raises awareness of everyday right-handed challenges.

August 16 – National Roller Coaster Day. Explore energy, build paper coasters, or spotlight ride engineering careers.

August 19 – World Humanitarian Day. Honor crisis responders and explore how teams can use STEM to meet community needs.

August 26 – Women’s Equality Day. Celebrate progress toward equality and assess whether recruitment, leadership, and team culture truly encourage girls and young women.

August 26 – World Photography Day. worldwide celebration of the art, craft, science and history of photography.

August 26 – International Dog Day. celebrate all dogs, encourage adoption from shelters, and honor working dogs

August 28 – National Bow Tie Day. Wear bow ties to a meeting, decorate a robot with one, or host a quick bow-tie design challenge.

August 31 - National Eat Outside Day. Gather some friends and enjoy every meal, snack, and beverage outside.

If you spot an error in the newsletter please email us at: FIRSTNC-EDI@googlegroups.com

Inspiration & Recognition Spotlight: *Danielle Boyer*



Danielle Boyer is an Indigenous robotics inventor, educator, author, and youth advocate who founded **The STEAM Connection**, a nonprofit dedicated to making robotics and technical education accessible to young people. Through programs such as *Every Kid Gets a Robot*, she designs affordable educational robots and provides them to students who might not otherwise have access to STEM learning opportunities.

Boyer’s own experiences helped shape her mission. As a young student interested in technology, she faced financial barriers to extracurricular STEM programs and later felt isolated as the only girl on her high-school robotics team. She responded by creating the kind of welcoming, culturally connected learning environment she wished she had experienced. Her work particularly supports Indigenous youth while demonstrating how robotics can preserve language, strengthen culture, and help students see themselves as inventors and problem-solvers.

Read more about **Danielle Boyer** - [HERE](#)

ED&I and YPP Training: *Recruit the Whole Student*

When speaking with prospective members, avoid asking only, “Are you interested in building or programming robots?” Instead, ask broader questions:

- What do you enjoy doing?
- What would you like to learn?
- Do you prefer creating, organizing, communicating, designing, leading, or working with people?
- What would make joining a new team feel comfortable for you?

Use their answers to connect them with several possible roles. A student who enjoys photography might contribute to media, scouting, awards, or documentation. Someone who enjoys talking with people may thrive in outreach, sponsorship, or presentations. A student who likes art could help with graphics, animation, robot appearance, or pit design.

During recruitment events, display the full range of team opportunities, not just the robot. Include examples of CAD, programming, fabrication, business planning, social media, photography, outreach, awards, strategy, and leadership. Make sure current students from different sub-teams are available to share their experiences.

Training activity: Give mentors and student leaders a list of five fictional prospective members with different interests. Ask them to identify at least three meaningful team roles for each student. This helps recruiters practice seeing potential instead of looking only for students who already have technical experience.

The *FIRST* NC ED&I Team: Contact us at: FIRSTNC-EDI@googlegroups.com

We are a team of coaches/mentors who want to help create a community and culture of people who embrace the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion, who want to develop themselves, and who understand that growth and diversity of all types lead to team excellence.

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All Editions are Available Online at: <https://www.firstnorthcarolina.org/belonging-newsletter>