

GuamFIRST

Your path to advancement from student to Key Volunteer

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The Do's and Don'ts of the Student – Volunteer Transition

In order to meet our organization's goals, GuamFIRST has a responsibility to maintain the long-term sustainability of our programs. Some of the current challenges to the sustainability of our volunteer corps include the explosive growth of the FIRST programs in Guam, a widely-felt desire to deliver more value to teams by transitioning to a new "District" competition format, and normal attrition of past volunteers. To counter these challenges and bring us closer to our organization's vision, GuamFIRST has instituted a program with a view of the entire volunteer "lifecycle" including recruitment, training, advancement, and efforts to mitigate organizational knowledge loss from outgoing volunteers.

Happily, when students graduate from teams and/or from college, they often want to give back to the FRC program! Many of these students are motivated to pursue specific volunteer goals – they want to be an FTA, or a Head Ref, or an LRI, or an MC or Game Announcer. When we connect with these passionate people who desire to be a Key Volunteer, GuamFIRST works to advance them towards their goals by helping them form into mature and experienced volunteers, often over several years of development. GuamFIRST has provided this document as a guide for understanding our volunteer advancement program.

With the growth of FIRST Programs in Minnesota, many students are graduating from teams and/or from college and wanting to give back to the FRC program. Many of these students have specific volunteer goals – they want to be an FTA, or a Head Ref, or an LRI, or an MC or Game Announcer. These Key Volunteer positions take a mature, experienced volunteer, and will take at least several years to work towards. Use this document as a guide as you work towards your volunteer goals!

GuamFIRST staffs our events with people who volunteer often and energetically. Every volunteer position is important-- no matter your role in the event, you have the ability to help us produce the event outcomes we expect. Successful volunteers work directly with the Volunteer Coordinator to ensure the event is a success. They are flexible and willing to gain any experience they can get, even if it's not immediately or directly applicable to their eventual volunteer goals.

***DO volunteer often and energetically.** Successful volunteers are willing to do anything needed to make this program a success, even if it isn't directly applicable to their volunteer goals. They work directly with the Volunteer Coordinator to ensure the event is a success.*

GuamFIRST people fulfill their commitments. We recognize that our events are successful only when our volunteers show up! Volunteers can help us with our responsibility to produce the best possible events by:

- Being honest about your schedule and stating your availability accurately.
- Being clear about what portion of the work you are able to take responsibility for.
- Being available for the entire event, often including setup and teardown.

Do fulfill all of your Volunteer Commitments. Events are successful only when Volunteers show up! State your availability accurately. Key Volunteer slots are assigned to Volunteers who can be present the entire event (often beginning Wednesday evening). The best way to “work your way” up the Volunteer ladder is to be honest about your schedule and what you truly can do at an event.

GuamFIRST Volunteer Coordinators are available to advise you. Because our Volunteer Coordinators have a central responsibility for our volunteer advancement program, they can help you identify the position that best fits your skills and goals, and they can provide specific expectations or recommendations for advancement. In addition, existing Key Volunteers are available to provide specific advice and mentorship, and are often asked for recommendations when a key position needs to be filled.

DO ask for advice from the Volunteer Coordinator and individuals in the role you want to fill. The Volunteer Coordinator can help a volunteer identify the position that provides the best fit for the individual, and help provide specific expectations or recommendations for advancement. Existing Key Volunteers can provide specific advice and mentorship, and are often asked for recommendations when a key position needs to be filled.

GuamFIRST people live gracious professionalism. In meeting our responsibility for producing the best possible events with the team experience held paramount, our volunteers become a part of every team they interact with. To help us meet this goal, volunteers can:

- Get the appropriate Key Volunteer to help impart bad news or handle difficult situations.
- In your personal communications (including social media), maintain an awareness of how your voice may be heard by your audience.

DO live Gracious Professionalism. When at an event, volunteers should become a part of every team they interact with. If a team starts to frown while a volunteer is working with them, something needs to change! If there is particularly bad news or a difficult situation, get the appropriate Key Volunteer to help. When not at an event, be aware that everything you do reflects on FIRST. This is especially true with social media – Tweets, posts, or blogs can easily cause issues for volunteers. Stay positive, think about how your post will be perceived, and if there’s an issue you’re concerned about, look for the appropriate avenue to voice it – bring it up with the appropriate Key Volunteer or Volunteer Coordinator!

GuamFIRST recognizes that everyone has limitations. Despite having overall responsibility for our events, the events we produce are complex enough that there’s no one person-- not even the Director of GuamFIRST!-- that knows everything about them. We are able to successfully

manage this complexity by trusting our volunteers to understand and execute their portions of the work. In your role as a volunteer, you can help us by:

- Knowing when to ask for assistance, advice, or a second opinion.
- Being willing to listen to others' opinions.

DO recognize your limitations. No one knows everything, and no one is perfect. Asking your Key Volunteer for assistance, advice, or a second opinion is actually a good thing. It shows us that you know what you don't know, and that you're willing to listen to others opinions. Even the Key Volunteers may not know the correct action for every situation, and they all have the ability to contact someone at FIRST for guidance during the event.

GuamFIRST recognizes that development of a Key Volunteer is a long process. Since there are a limited number of these positions, we are able to work with volunteers for several years before asking them to fill a high-profile role. GuamFIRST uses this time to help our volunteers develop important technical and interpersonal skills that they'll need on the job they are aiming for. Not all who start this development path will finish it, but along the way GuamFIRST makes every effort to reward the hard work, dedication, and adaptability displayed by these volunteers.

DON'T expect to get a lot of responsibility quickly. Many young volunteers served in leadership positions on their team before graduating, but that doesn't transfer to volunteer positions. Volunteers need to prove their maturity and capabilities to their Volunteer Coordinator and Key Volunteers in order to earn more responsibility.

DON'T expect a Key Volunteer position right away. The majority of Key Volunteer or Judge positions at FRC events generally are not granted to students in college or recent graduates.

GuamFIRST is open to change, and expects openness in others. Since GuamFIRST's success has been so directly attributable to its adaptability, openness to change is something we highly value. A "generation" of high school students is only 4 years! As our volunteer advancement program brings in new people with new ideas, our procedures will necessarily adapt to fit. We invite you to help us shape the future of GuamFIRST by sharing your insight with your Volunteer Coordinators. We ask you to please enter into your new volunteer role with a similar open-mindedness and a willingness to learn about the GuamFIRST culture.

DON'T expect FRC to run the same way as FTC or FLL. Each FIRST program assigns volunteers slightly differently. Expectations regarding experience and scheduling vary widely. Plan to work with your Volunteer Coordinator to find the right fit and right advancement track for you!

GuamFIRST is sensitive to conflicts of interest-- whether real or perceived. Although many of our volunteers are associated with teams, GuamFIRST explicitly trusts you to use your volunteer position in a way that is fair to all teams. However, as an organization we have a core

responsibility to guard ourselves against the appearance of conflict of interest. You can help us by:

- Informing your Volunteer Coordinator about your current or former ties to any team.
- Ensuring that your actions can't be construed as giving any team an unfair advantage.
- Keeping verbal exclamations, cheering, and hand motions to a minimum when watching matches.
- Step back and allow other volunteers to handle any issues where you may have a (real or perceived) conflict of interest.

DON'T use your volunteer position to help your team. Many of our regional volunteers are associated with teams as mentors, parents, or former students. It's natural for a volunteer to check in with their team occasionally or watch their matches. However, it's important for volunteers to ensure that their actions can't be construed as giving their team an unfair advantage. When watching a match from the floor, verbal exclamations, cheering, and hand motions should be kept to an absolute minimum. If any issues come up with their team, volunteers need to step back and allow other volunteers to handle it.

GuamFIRST handles mistakes as gracious professionals

Everyone makes mistakes, even key FIRST personnel like Lead Robot Inspectors, Head Refs, and the GDC (remember Lunacy?). It's how we respond to our mistakes that determines how our organization will learn and grow from the experience.

The responsibility to use our training, skills, experience, and creativity to present the best possible event is a function that GuamFIRST shares with every single one of our volunteers. However, the final responsibility for these events rests with us-- and us only! Here are some ways that you can help GuamFIRST in meeting our responsibility:

- If you think you have contributed to a problem, talk with your Key Volunteer or Volunteer Coordinator.
- Ask your Key Volunteer or Volunteer Coordinator for guidance on how you might be able to help us repair any damage.
- Show that you are open to advice and feedback.

So you screwed up...

It happens. You may have said something that was taken poorly. You may have done something with your team that gives them an unintended advantage. There are very, very few things volunteers can do that will permanently affect their ability to volunteer where they want!

If you do make a mistake, own it. Talk with your Key Volunteer or Volunteer Coordinator. Apologize and ask for guidance on repairing the damage. If you can show that you are open to advise and willing to do what's needed, you'll be able to get back to your preferred position. In some cases, it may take a year or two of volunteering in a lower profile position in order to prove you have the maturity needed, and prove that you can handle the responsibility that comes with a higher profile position.

More information

Information on all volunteer positions is available on FIRST's website (<http://www.usfirst.org/community/volunteers/frc-volunteer-event-positions>). Most positions include some level of on-site training, and some require pre-event training or certification. For all positions, there will be a clearly defined Key Volunteer to answer questions or help out during the event – don't be afraid to reach out for their support and guidance!

Specific volunteer positions

Information on all volunteer positions is available on FIRST's website (<http://www.usfirst.org/community/volunteers/frc-volunteer-event-positions>). Most positions include some level of on-site training, and some require pre-event training or certification. For all positions, you will have a clearly defined Key Volunteer to answer questions or help out during the event – use them!