nemo
non-engineering mentor organization

FIRST LEGO League World Festival

Congratulations! Qualifying for the FLL World Festival is a significant accomplishment. The Festival itself is an amazing experience. You get to meet some of the best teams from around the world.

While there are some teams that make repeat trips to the Festival, most teams are going for the first time. This paper offers advice for teams to help make their experience the best it can be.

HAVE FUN!

Who's going?
One of the first things to decide is who will make the trip.

- Can all the students on the team go? There may be a variety of reasons that team members might not be able to attend.
- Who will chaperone? Can family members accompany the group? Will every student be required to be accompanied by a parent?
- If the team is school-sponsored, what requirements does your district have for travel?
- Get commitments early so you can make plans for transportation and lodging.
- Note the registration fees, deadlines, and important team information on the FLL website.

Getting there

- Automobile
  - Advantages
    - Least expensive
    - Most flexibility in schedule
    - Cars are available for use in Atlanta
  - Disadvantages
    - Requires drivers and proper insurance
    - Must pay for parking at some hotels which can be expensive
    - Timing might make it impractical for long distances
- Airplane
  - Advantages
    - Less travel time
    - Atlanta is a major airline hub
    - Good public transportation from airport to downtown
    - You may need fewer nights' lodging
    - Only option available for most international teams
  - Disadvantages
    - More expensive
    - Harder to schedule, might not be possible for entire team to be on same flight – check with airline about "sports team rates"
    - Less flexible
- Train (Amtrak) could be possible for some teams – one route goes through Atlanta
- Charter Bus
  - Advantages
    - Some flexibility in scheduling
    - More comfortable travel than car
    - Everyone is together
    - Bus could be available for use in Atlanta

    - Disadvantages
        - Probably most expensive option, unless there are at least 20 people in your party
        - Long-distance travel could be impractical, unless your charter has multiple drivers and you don't mind an overnight on the bus
- Travel with a *FIRST* Robotics Competition (FRC) or *FIRST* Vex Challenge (FVC) team
    - Advantages
        - Your FLL team may already be mentored by an FRC or FVC team
        - May be able to add your team to their plans at a lower cost per person
    - Disadvantages
        - Carefully consider the interactions between your team and a team of high school students.
        - You will have to fit your plans to their schedule

International teams

Teams from outside the USA have some special travel considerations. Most will have to fly, because of the distance. There is also the issue of passports and visas. Getting these documents processed as soon as possible is most important. There have been teams that couldn't make the Festival because they didn't get visas. If that looks like it will be a problem, try contacting *FIRST*. They may have government contacts that can expedite the process, although nothing can be guaranteed.

FIRST works to have translators available if needed.

Extra costs are also a hardship.

Lodging

FIRST offers packages for lodging at hotels in Atlanta through a travel agency, most within walking distance of the Georgia Dome. (Sometimes it's a long walk.) Check the FLL website for details. Often the packages are less expensive than getting rooms at the same hotels on your own. The package also includes tickets for the Finale on Saturday evening. One bonus being in a package hotel is being with all the other FLL, FVC and FRC teams.

Some hotel packages include breakfast and lunch options at the competition site. Food quality may not be the best, and lines are very long. An option for breakfast is to bring items with you to your hotel room – individually wrapped donuts and pastries, fruit, juice boxes, individual cereal packets (keep the milk on ice in a cooler), etc.

If you have transportation available in Atlanta, you may be able to find lower rates at outlying hotels and motels. Consider your commute to the site – Atlanta rush hour traffic can be atrocious. Consider using the MARTA (public transportation system) to get around – inexpensive and convenient.

Some teams have requested on the FLL Forum to be hosted by Atlanta area teams in their homes. It can save on money, but more importantly it can be a cultural exchange.

Paying for it

Going to the World Festival is more expensive than local and state competitions. There is a $1000 entry fee to partially cover the costs of putting on such a big event. The team will also have to pay for travel and lodging.

If you do not have a corporate sponsor, it may be time to look for one. Approach local businesses – stores, banks and credit unions, engineering and other professional firms – to see if they will sponsor you. Independent local businesses can often make a decision quickly. Civic and service groups, such as Rotary or Elks Club, are also potential sources. Don't just ask for money; offer to show them what you can do. Perhaps your team could be the program for one of their meetings.

You should do some fundraising as a team, even though the amounts raised may not be very significant. When the team works for funds on its own, businesses may be more willing to contribute than if the team was only seeking donations. Common events are car washes, dinners and bake sales. Get creative – is there something unique that your team can do?

Some teams self-fund, with families paying all costs.

Before you go

The partner in charge of your qualifying tournament will inform *FIRST* that you have qualified for the World Festival. You will then get an email or other correspondence telling you how to register. Make sure you follow all procedures, and check your email and the FLL website for updates.

You must have all your paperwork properly completed. Some of it you bring with you to turn in at registration, some of it you may have to submit earlier via website or email. Watch all deadlines. You can't just call a parent to get a consent form signed if you are 2000 miles apart.

Other things to prepare are team profiles, team and robot pictures, and submissions for mentor and youth mentor awards.

Festival site

Ceremonies and the table competition are held in the Georgia Dome in Atlanta. The pits and judging areas are in the adjoining Georgia World Congress Center (GWCC). See http://www.gwcc.com/ Coaches will be given maps. Teams are often escorted from one place to another.

What to do?

- Have fun
- Look for activities for stops along the way – consult travel guides and online resources
- There are many activities and attractions in Atlanta. See www.atlanta.net for the Convention and Visitor's Bureau. Some teams schedule an extra day or two before or after the tournament for fun and sightseeing.
- Have fun
- *FIRST* often organizes events just for FLL. In the past this has included a museum visit, an ice cream social, and a talent show. Take advantage of meeting teams from around the world and having fun with them.
- Get enough sleep.
- Have fun
- Keep your schedule flexible, and don't try to do so much that team members are exhausted.
- Have FUN

At the competition

The most important thing about the World Festival is not the competition. Much more important are the experiences that can be gained. Every team there has already achieved excellence.

"Official stuff"

- Preliminaries
    - Check-in, registration and coach meeting on Wednesday evening. Have all your paperwork with you then.
    - Information, official schedules, site plan maps and identification badges will be distributed
- Opening ceremonies in the Georgia Dome on Thursday morning
- Set up the pit – decorate to show something about your team and your state/province/country
- Since most teams cannot bring their tables with them, you will have to use the supplied practice tables. Sign up early and be fair with your times.
- Judging
    - Judging takes place on Thursday – teamwork, technical and project presentation
        - Teams are escorted directly from one session to the next
    - Experienced volunteer judges are recruited from around the world
- Practice rounds – when not in judging sessions, teams will get practice on the tournament tables. Teams are escorted to the Georgia Dome from the pit area.
- FLL teams attend FRC Opening Ceremonies on Friday morning
- Competition rounds take place Friday morning and early afternoon
- Judging call-backs will be scheduled on Friday, if necessary. Judges may also visit teams in the pits or on the competition floor

- Alliance event takes place later Friday afternoon. Teams are grouped and given a task related to the table competition, for all robots in the group.
- Pits are cleared on Friday
- Award ceremony is Saturday morning
- Teams may watch FRC competition
- *FIRST* award ceremony takes place late Saturday, following the FRC finals. The FLL Champion Award trophy is presented.
- The Finale is held in Centennial Park on Saturday evening for those teams who have booked a hotel through FIRST's travel agency, or purchased tickets separately.
- Make sure students never wander alone. You may want to make a team rule that they must always be with an adult, but at minimum they must always be with another team member. Set up a method in advance for finding lost parents and coaches.
- The pit area can be very loud. Sometimes it is beneficial for the team to find a quieter area to practice or confer. Areas of the main concourse of the GWCC are not congested, or you can go outside if the weather is good. Leave a parent behind in your pit area so they can direct anyone who is looking for the team – you'd hate to miss a judging callback!
- Team members, coaches and parents are a visual representation – not only your team, but your state, province or country, and FLL as a whole. Wherever you go, everyone should conduct themselves keeping FLL Values and Gracious Professionalism in mind.

"Important Stuff"

- Have fun
- Meet other teams
- Trade items – pins and trinkets.
- Don't forget to eat, and drink plenty of water. There are many options in the GWCC near the pit area and the Georgia Dome. There is also a large food court in the CNN building.
- Have fun
- The announcers for the competition tables are very appreciative of receiving give-away items. (They see who can get the best stuff.) If you have flags or banners they will show them as they announce your team. They will often wear team hats, capes, or other costumes.
- Borrow some safety glasses and tour the FRC and FVC pit areas.
- Have fun
- Watch some of the FRC competition
- Have fun!
- In case you haven't figured it out yet – HAVE FUN!!!

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