Key Stakeholders

Who are the Key Stakeholders?

In order for a college or university FIRST program to be successful, participation from four key stakeholder areas is required. These areas are:

- college students
- college faculty or administrators
- community partners
- sponsors

While individual stakeholders in any of these four areas can lead the push to start a college FIRST program, without involvement from each of the four most program sponsors will struggle to remain sustainable. The following are descriptions of what to look for in each of the key stakeholders, and where to look for them.

- **Students:**
  
  o **What to look for:** Motivated college students are the heart of a college FIRST program. They are the key stakeholders who will be going out into the community, working with youth, and passing on the knowledge, skills and understanding that they have obtained in school through their previous FIRST experiences. It is especially important when starting a program that the students are motivated and excited to be there. This will help to ensure that the students won’t flake out and quit when things become busy with the build seasons for FIRST and their academics. In additional, while it is not necessary for the students to have previous FIRST Robotics experience, it is certainly helpful if at least some of them have familiarity with these programs. It is also very important that the students understand that they are there to mentor the younger students and teach them how to successfully compete in robotics competitions, and not to create their own robots and compete themselves.

  o **Where to look:** While any student can certainly be a good mentor, it might be best to begin by identifying students in those disciplines that directly benefit from involvement in FIRST. Because FIRST supports STEM careers (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), students pursuing STEM degrees are more likely to have an interest in robotics, to be excited about FIRST, and even to have familiarity with FIRST.
programs. In addition, students pursuing careers in math and science education would have a strong interest in getting involved in this type of a hands-on learning experience. It may also be helpful to identify existing student organizations that have similar or compatible goals, such as student run engineering, technology, and science clubs or societies.

- **Faculty/Administration:**

  o **What to look for:** Active participation from a faculty member or college administrator is an essential part of any student organization, and a college FIRST program is no exception. Their role is not only to act as a primary contact within the university, but also to serve as advisors to the program members and to facilitate the college students’ access to university resources that could be helpful to the program.

  o **Where to look:** Similar to identifying participating students, a good faculty or administrative advisor could come from a variety of areas, but perhaps the best place to start looking would be in departments such as engineering, science and technology. These are disciplines whose educational goals are more closely connected to the larger mission of FIRST and its goals of promoting and increasing youth engagement in STEM careers.

- **Community:**

  o **What to look for:** Community stakeholders is a very broad category because there are numerous ways in which you can cultivate local participation. In the most basic sense, what is needed is either a group of kids in the community who want to start a team, or an adult (or group of adults) who wants to start a team in their community. While a college FIRST program can be started with either group, it is important to note that both kids and adults from the community are needed for a program like this to both succeed and to be sustained.

  o **Where to look:** There are many places to look for community stakeholders, and while the following list is by no means comprehensive, it does provide a few places to begin searching in the community:
    - Local K-12 schools
    - YMCA or YWCA
    - Boy Scout or Girl Scout troops
4-H clubs
• Church youth groups
• Local home school co-ops
• After school or extracurricular enrichment programs

**Sponsors:**

- **What to look for:** Stakeholders in this category are essential to the success of a local college FIRST program, and they can be grouped into two varieties: monetary and in-kind sponsors. A monetary sponsor provides funds directly, while an in-kind sponsor may provide a range of resources including their time (mentorship), much needed workspace or tools, and material resources. Sponsors help to keep a college FIRST program staffed, supplied and funded, and without strong sponsorship all of the other stakeholders will find it difficult to successfully fulfill their roles. Sponsors should be viewed as program partners rather than simply as resources. As key stakeholders, they must recognize that they both benefit as well as contribute to the program. Sponsors can be classified into two groups: primary and secondary sponsors. A primary sponsor is one who is able to provide a sufficient monetary donation that can sustain the college FIRST program for an entire year. A secondary sponsor is a smaller contributor who is able to provide material or time resources, or a smaller monetary gift, often earmarked for a specific area. Ideally, every college FIRST program will have a primary sponsor, but these can be hard to identify, thus it may be more practical to find a number of secondary sponsors to make up for the lack of a primary sponsor, especially at the program's inception.

- **Where to look:** When seeking a primary sponsor, try to identify larger companies and organizations that operate on a statewide or national scale, but which have facilities or headquarters within the community. While it can be a challenge to demonstrate the value and benefits of a college FIRST program to a primary sponsor, the time and effort invested can be well worth it because they are more likely to provide more significant levels of sponsorship. Secondary sponsors are often easier to identify and can be found in locally run businesses throughout the community as well as within the university or college itself. While secondary sponsors may not be able to provide large donations, they may take a more active interest in the well being of their community as well as in the success of the FIRST program that they are supporting, thus increasing the likelihood that they will continue their sponsorship.