

Belonging

the newsletter from the *FIRST* NC ED&I Team – July 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.

Training & Skill Development

A strong robotics team is built on more than technical ability—it is rooted in confidence, collaboration, and a willingness to learn. Guided by the FIRST core values, we strive to create an environment where every student feels empowered to explore new skills across all sub-teams, including CAD, software, mechanical, electrical, and marketing. When students are encouraged to step outside their comfort zones and take on unfamiliar roles, the result is a team that is not only more capable, but also more connected and supportive.

Technical confidence develops over time through hands-on experience, mentorship, and an understanding that mistakes are a natural part of the learning process. Veteran members can play a key role in this growth by guiding newer students, sharing knowledge, and fostering a culture where questions are welcomed. Whether it is wiring a robot, debugging code, designing CAD parts, or supporting outreach efforts, every contribution matters and every skill strengthens the team.

Leadership development is equally important and extends beyond formal titles. It is demonstrated through initiative, communication, and the ability to support and uplift others. As students build technical confidence, they also grow into mentors, problem-solvers, and role models who help sustain the team's success over time. By investing in both skill development and leadership, we prepare students not only for competition season, but also for future academic and professional environments.

To support this growth, there are several effective strategies teams can use to build confidence, strengthen technical skills across sub-teams, and develop leadership within the organization:

- Encourage students to take on new tasks, even without prior experience, so they can learn through doing rather than observation alone.
- Provide consistent hands-on learning opportunities across all areas of the team, from mechanical assembly and coding to CAD design and outreach planning.
- Normalize mistakes as part of the engineering process so students feel comfortable experimenting, troubleshooting, and asking questions.
- Pair newer members with experienced mentors to build confidence while reinforcing leadership and communication skills.
- Recognize and celebrate small milestones and improvements to reinforce progress and maintain motivation.
- Promote collaboration between sub-teams so students gain a better understanding of how each area contributes to the overall system.
- Give students ownership of meaningful tasks and responsibilities to help them develop both technical independence and leadership skills.
- Maintain a supportive team culture where all students feel respected, valued, and encouraged to contribute ideas.

Our goal is to build a team environment where students are confident in their abilities, eager to learn from one another, and motivated to grow continuously. When that foundation is in place, students become more innovative, collaborative, and prepared to take on challenges both on and off the field.

The offseason is the ideal time to put these practices into motion and set the tone for everything that follows in build season. Without the pressure of competition deadlines, teams have the space to experiment, learn new skills, and strengthen connections across sub-teams in a more intentional way. Investing in training, mentorship, and leadership development now creates a stronger foundation for when challenges inevitably become more fast-paced and high-stakes. The habits built in the offseason—confidence, collaboration, and curiosity—are the ones that carry a team through setbacks and ultimately shape its success when it matters most.

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

Holidays and Events:

July is Disability Pride Month, UV Safety Awareness Month, and Park and Recreation Month

July 1: Canada Day, or Fête du Canada - A Canadian federal holiday that celebrates the 1867 enactment of the Constitution Act, establishing the three former British colonies of Canada, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick as a united nation called Canada.

July 1 – National Creative Ice Cream Flavors Day - Exploring bold, unexpected, and artisanal ice cream flavors.

July 4: Independence Day - Celebrates the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th, 1776.

July 7: World Chocolate Day - The global celebration honors the introduction of chocolate to Europe in 1550

July 9 (sundown) to July 10 (sundown): The Martyrdom of the Bab is a day when Bahá'ís observe the anniversary of the Báb's execution in Tabriz, Iran, in 1850.

July 10: National Kitten Day - Raising crucial awareness for homeless kittens in shelters and promoting adoption.

July 11: St. Benedict Day - The feast day of St. Benedict celebrated by some Christian denominations.

July 14: International Nonbinary People's Day - Aimed at raising awareness and organizing around the issues faced by nonbinary people around the world while celebrating their contributions.

July 18: Nelson Mandela International Day - Established on July 18th, 2009 in recognition of Nelson Mandela's birthday via a unanimous decision of the UN General Assembly.

July 23: The Birthday of Haile Selassie I - Former emperor of Ethiopia whom the Rastafarians consider to be their savior, is celebrated on this day.

July 24: Pioneer Day - Observed by Mormons to commemorate the arrival of the first Latter-day Saints pioneer in Salt Lake Valley in 1847.

July 25: St. James the Greater Day - A feast day for St. James the Greater celebrated by some Christian denominations.

July 26: Disability Independence Day - Celebrates the anniversary of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act.

July 27: St. Vladimir Day - A Roman Catholic feast celebrating St. Vladimir.

July 29: Asalha Puja, or Dharma Day - Celebrates Buddha's first teachings.

July 30: The International Day of Friendship - Proclaimed in 2011 by the UN General Assembly.

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

Inspiration & Recognition Spotlight: Limor “Ladyada” Fried



Limor “Ladyada” Fried is an electrical engineer, entrepreneur, and maker-education leader best known as the founder of Adafruit Industries. Through Adafruit, she has helped make electronics, coding, and hardware design more accessible to students, educators, hobbyists, and future engineers around the world.

Her work reflects the idea that technical confidence is built by doing. Adafruit’s tutorials, kits, guides, and open-source hardware resources encourage learners to try new skills, troubleshoot problems, and see mistakes as part of the creative engineering process. Whether someone is blinking their first LED, soldering a circuit, programming a microcontroller, or building a robotics project, the message is clear: you do not have to know everything before you begin.

Limor Fried’s impact goes beyond technology itself. She has helped create a culture where learning is shared, curiosity is encouraged, and beginners are welcomed into technical spaces. Her example reminds us that leadership in STEM can mean opening doors for others, making knowledge easier to access, and helping people believe they belong in engineering.

Read more about Limor “Ladyada” Fried - [HERE](#)

ED&I and YPP Training: Try Every Role

One of the best ways to build confidence, empathy, and team-wide understanding is to encourage every team member to try every role. This includes students, mentors, and volunteers. When everyone has the opportunity to experience different parts of the team, it sends a powerful message: every role is valuable, every student is capable of learning, and no area of the team is reserved for only certain people.

During the offseason, teams can create low-pressure opportunities for members to rotate through different sub-teams such as CAD, mechanical, electrical, software, strategy, scouting, marketing, awards, and outreach. A student who usually works on media might discover an interest in wiring. A mechanical student might gain a better appreciation for programming challenges. A mentor might better understand the student experience by stepping into a task outside their own comfort zone.

Trying every role does not mean everyone must become an expert in every area. Instead, it helps team members understand how each part of the team contributes to the whole. It also reduces barriers for students who may be hesitant to join a new sub-team because they feel they do not have the right background or experience.

Cross-training builds stronger teams by encouraging curiosity, respect, and collaboration. It helps students ask better questions, support one another more effectively, and recognize that technical confidence grows through practice. Most importantly, it reinforces the idea that everyone belongs, everyone can contribute, and everyone has the potential to grow into new skills and leadership roles.

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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