

PUBLIC RELEASE

« Overview	Table of Contents	Team Structure & Leadership »
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Season Breakdown

growingSTEMS begins its fiscal and operational year on July 1st and ends its year on June 30th. This was selected to generally align with the academic calendar as well as cleanly splitting the calendar year in half during the summer.

Summer Offseason

After the team has finished with official competitions for the year, students and mentors focus our efforts on our community outreach programs. We hold community events every year and impact thousands of other individuals. These outreach efforts are a large part of the success of our program. We hold events year-round, but the majority of them are throughout the summer and fall months.

Summer is used for preparing for the upcoming season. This is when many of our advanced projects take place. This can include exploring new programming languages, experimenting with mechanical design, to even upgrading The Hive infrastructure. These activities are usually less scheduled than in other seasons, as many families have summer travel and camps that occur during this time. Still, this is a popular time for meetings and our Monday and Thursday meeting times still typically occur, albeit with much more relaxed attendance expectations.

Fall Offseason

During the preseason R&D session, our team is training students on all aspects of robot design. We also spend that time developing new concept ideas for possible future use on competition robots.

During this period, every student goes through various training activities designed to teach and reinforce instruction of team organization, the FIRST Robotics organization, robot systems, the engineering design process, and shop safety.

Build Season

The build season takes place in January and February. The FRC kick-off, which generally takes place on the first non-holiday Saturday in January, is when the annual game is unveiled to the world. On this day all FIRST teams learn what the game is about, how it is played, and what the rules are. This is all detailed in a very long game manual released to the teams. The game manual for the 2025-2026 season can be found [here](#).

Once the game has been announced, every team around the world starts scrambling to learn the game and design, build, and test that robot. The aim is to complete this process in a short six-week period. It is at this time the team begins to meet on Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays (at least).

The build season generally follows the notional schedule below.

- Week one should have each team focus on getting their ideas together and deciding on how they want to play the prescribed game. They are also beginning to develop concept ideas.
- Week two should consist of prototype development and testing of concept ideas.
- Week three should see the completion of prototyping and the finalization of robot designs and concepts. The acquisition of materials is also an important part of this on-time manufacturing process.
- Week four should consist of robot assembly.
- Week five should see the end of construction of the robot to allow for testing of the robot in week six.
- Week six should be used for the testing of the robot and allowing time for modifications and driving skills development.

This build schedule varies from year to year. This used to be a hard deadline! Each team had to bag and tag their robot at the end of six weeks. However, the bag day was retired at the end of the 2018-2019 season. Since 2020, teams have been able to work on their robot up until, during, and after their first event.

Competition Season

The competition season generally takes place in March and April. The FRC competition season takes place over eight weeks. For the district model, which we participate in, weeks one through five typically involve district qualifier events. For 2026, The RoboBees participated in week two and four events. Weeks six and seven are typically the District Championships. In 2026, the Chesapeake District Championship took place in week seven. Week eight typically comprises the FIRST Championship (aka Worlds).

Schedule Example

The schedule for the 2026 build and competition season can be found below. Future FRC schedules will follow a similar format but may differ depending on the kick-off and competition dates.

Phase	Task/Milestone	Start	End
Planning	Kickoff and Game Reveal	10-Jan	10-Jan
	Game Strategy Agreement	10-Jan	11-Jan
	Early Prototyping	12-Jan	14-Jan
	Subsystem Concept Sketching	15-Jan	16-Jan
	System Requirements Review	17-Jan	18-Jan
	Robot Layout Agreement (PDR)	18-Jan	18-Jan
Development	Prototyping & Detailed Modeling	18-Jan	23-Jan
	Subsystem Modeling	18-Jan	26-Jan
	CAD/Software Review and Approval (CDR)	27-Jan	30-Jan
	Manufacturing	27-Jan	3-Feb
Integration	Mechanism Assembly	3-Feb	12-Feb
	Full Robot Integration	12-Feb	16-Feb
	Testing and Troubleshooting	16-Feb	26-Feb

Phase	Task/Milestone	Start	End
Practice/Iteration	Drive Team Selection	26-Feb	26-Feb
	Drive Team Practice	27-Feb	13-Mar
	Refinement of Mechanisms	26-Feb	8-Mar
	Design Freeze	9-Mar	13-Mar
	Competition and Documentation Preparation	10-Feb	13-Feb
	Post-Event Iteration #1	16-Mar	27-Mar
	Post-Event Iteration #2	30-Mar	8-Apr
	Post-Event Iteration #3	13-Apr	24-Apr
	Trailer Transit to FIRST Championship	24-Apr	29-Apr
Competition	FCH District Pasadena MD Event	13-Mar	15-Mar
	FCH District Severn MD Event	27-Mar	29-Mar
	FIRST Chesapeake District Championship	9-Apr	12-Apr
	FIRST Championship	29-Apr	2-May

Competition Format

We participate in the FIRST Chesapeake District. The RoboBees will attend two district events with the goal of qualifying for the FIRST Chesapeake District Championship. From the district championship, we hope to qualify for the FIRST Championship.

District Qualifiers

Every team that registers under the district model competes in at least two district qualifier events. Each event involves approximately 35 teams competing in approximately 70 qualifications matches, leading into alliance selection and a double-elimination bracket.

District Championship

The Chesapeake District Championship, as of 2026, draws 54 teams from the Chesapeake region (Maryland, DC, and Virginia). From that event, 19 teams qualified for the FIRST Championship.

The RoboBees typically perform very well at the district championship level. The RoboBees hold the record for winning the [most Chesapeake District Championships at four wins](#). We won the inaugural Chesapeake District Championship back in 2016, as well as in 2022, 2024, and 2026. We were also finalists in 2025. The next best team has only two Chesapeake District Championship wins.

FIRST Championship

The FIRST Championship is the culmination of the entire season. This event is an enormous spectacle, drawing teams from across the world. Billed as the world's largest K-12 robotics event, it brings FIRST's three programs (FRC, FTC, and FLL) under one roof. The [FIRST Championship website](#) notes that the 2025 FIRST Championship had 50,000 attendees from 66 counties, including 19,000 students across 1,055 teams and 1,000 event volunteers.

FIRST Championship has been in Houston in some form since 2017. Between 2017 and 2019, two FIRST Championship events took place, with one in Houston and the other in either St. Louis (2017) or Detroit (2018 and 2019). FIRST Championship did not take place in 2020 or 2021. When it returned in 2022, it came back as a single event located in Houston. In 2026, it was [announced](#) that the FIRST Championship will remain at the George R. Brown Convention Center (GRB) in Houston through 2034.

The RoboBees have attended FIRST Championship since 2011. We hold the dubiously prestigious record as one of the teams to have attended FIRST Championship the most without making it to the playoffs (the Einstein field). In 2023 and 2026, we were division finalists. We hope to break this record in the future!

Off-season

Off-season events are typically one-day events that feel similar to a smaller district qualifier event. These take place in the summer and fall and are hosted outside of FIRST. The RoboBees typically treats off-season events as learning experiences for new students. Events that we have attended in recent years include Rumble in the Roads, The Battle o' Baltimore, and the Chesapeake Robotics Invitational.

[« Overview](#) [Table of Contents](#) [Team Structure & Leadership »](#)

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