

# BEST PRACTICES FOR COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Outreach is how a team engages in the community, how hard it tries to reach out to both contacts and strangers, and its endeavors to spread awareness of FIRST and STEM. Here are a few techniques that The Holy Cows have found useful for outreach in our community.

## General Volunteering Events (unrelated to FIRST)

First find where you're going to do your outreach. (See *Creating Relationships in the Community*) It's very useful to build long-standing relationships and return to events annually, so the organization will become familiar with your team and so it's easier for you to plan your yearly schedule.

If you have the opportunity to promote FIRST at a non-FIRST event, go for it! Ask the organization to see if you can set up a table with flyers and interactive material. We like to bring square-bots to events at schools or community fairs; kids can drive the robots while parents learn about FIRST by talking to team members. During many events you won't have the opportunity to set up your own table, so take that chance to simply have fun with the event and help out as best you can, all the while making a positive impact on the community and the people hosting the event.

Make it a priority to bring the amount of people that you say you will, and be punctual.

## FIRST Events (FLL/FTC/FRC competitions, off-season competitions)

Invite as many people as you can to come to the event. This may not be realistic for a FLL Qualifying Tournament (QT), but it's a good idea for a FRC Regional. Every year, we invite as many people as we can to the San Diego Regional; sponsors, politicians, media, parents, our school, and the general public. You can do that through emails, social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc), and handing out flyers.

If you have VIPs coming to a FIRST event (such as a politician, sponsor, or the media), make sure you have experienced members from your team to show them around, explain the event, and answer any questions.

Find out if there are other VIPs coming that your team did not invite and see if there's a chance your team members can talk to them. If another team invited the VIP, be respectful and don't try to steal them away, but it's always good to say hello and introduce yourselves.

## Politicians

If your team has no political contacts, start small and work your way up. It may take several years, but if you begin by talking to district education officials, you can progress to talking to general city officials, the mayor, and then eventually to the state department.

City officials will be your best friends; though they are frequently busy, many of them have a strong interest in supporting STEM education, and they are more readily available than state officials.

Invite politicians to major FIRST events. If you have an established relationship with a politician, make the invitation personal.

Research or ask about how you could get a city FIRST Day declared. It differs between cities, but generally if you've found a contact who loves FIRST, they are happy to support it by declaring a city day.

Never let a contact trail off. Email the politician at least a few times a year, and make sure to introduce new members as veterans graduate.

## Media

As with politicians, start small. It's much easier to get local or neighborhood newspapers to write an article about you (or accept an article that your team submits), and then work up to citywide papers as your team gains prominence in the community.

Though we've found newspapers as the best place to start, also look at online news, television, and radios.

If you attend professional conferences, many times media will also be present. Talk to them and build contacts.

Again, invite the media to major FIRST events and make sure that you retain media contacts.

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## School

Be involved! Make sure your school knows about you and is excited for you. Encourage your team members to talk to other students about robotics. Attend school-wide meetings and show off your robots. Have a display case with some information about your team and awards you've received.

Have a school spirit day, and encourage people to come to the local regional (if close by). Around the time of the San Diego Regional, The Holy Cows hosts a school-wide meeting where we talk about the game, present our robot, and invite people to come to watch us compete. And of course, we've been advocating that on the day of our meeting, people come to school dressed in black and white, sporting cowbells and Holstein spots.

Sell team merchandise! The Holy Cows have a supporter shirt that we sell to non-team members, which is nearly identical to team shirts but with inverted colors and without sponsors. Many students and parents have bought shirts, which is wonderful for both spirit and fund raising. Bracelets are also popular.

## Sponsors

Send out a monthly update to keep sponsors in the know of what your team is doing.

Invite your sponsors to all major events, both to thank them and to show what you're doing.

Ask to see if any employees could mentor you during the build season.

## Social Media

Have an active presence in whatever social media is most convenient to you. Our most successful media is our Facebook page, where a team member or mentor can easily post pictures or status updates with a smartphone. Whatever social media becomes your favorite, make sure that you can and do update it regularly.

On your social media, apart from posting about your events, make sure to include photos, videos, and material to interact with your followers.

Find a way to reach out to people who do not have social media. We send out a monthly newsletter from [www.mailchimp.com](http://www.mailchimp.com) that goes to our sponsors, alumni, and parents.