

Involving Volunteers

Encourage potential volunteers to visit www.roboticseducation.org/volunteers to learn more about how they can become involved in supporting your VEX IQ Challenge event. Volunteering at robotics events can be rewarding and fun.

There are a variety of volunteer roles available at VEX IQ Challenge events. Many volunteer positions do not require technical skills or experience, only a desire to support engaging learning opportunities for students. Whatever your potential volunteers are interested in, help them identify the role that best suits them by sharing this [Volunteer Roles Overview document](#). They can also view volunteer training materials and additional resources and sign up for a local event in their area or for the VEX Robotics World Championship at www.roboticseducation.org/volunteers.

Volunteer Recruitment

Many people are eager to volunteer and participating in a VEX IQ Challenge event can help them get inspired, fuel their passion, learn new skills, expand their network, and get exposure to new ways of doing things.

There are many sources where you can recruit volunteers. You need to get the word out early about your event and share the key message of robotics and STEM programs to find people who feel this truly resonates with them. Consider the following sources:

- **Parents, Teachers, School Administrators, Mentors, Local VRC/VEX U Teams, and Siblings** – Remember volunteering can be a family affair, as younger siblings are often good at Field Reset.
- **Partner with Local Schools** – Contact nearby schools and agree to do a “volunteer swap” so they provide volunteers for your event, and you provide volunteers for their event.
- **Local Businesses and Sponsors** – Robotics events are perfect for a team-building experience, so contact the HR department if you don’t know someone in the company.
- **Schools, Colleges, Universities** – Classes, honor societies, sororities and fraternities may have community service requirements for membership, scholarships, or graduation. Also look to clubs/groups, College of Engineering, and ROTC programs for assistance. Give your local Army recruiter a table in exchange for providing volunteers. Pre-service tech and student teachers are also ideal candidates for volunteering.
- **Community Groups, Organization Chapters, Church Groups** – Many are looking for guest speakers or ask if you can set up a table to hand out materials. Check with your local maker community, TechShop, Local UAW, NSBE, IEEE, SWE, Chamber of Commerce, Library, etc.
- **Online Resources** – LinkedIn has a [site dedicated to volunteer opportunities](#), and there are free and subscription services like [VolunteerMatch](#) where you can post about your event. Idealist.org and thecommunitycorps.org are among many sites offering volunteer opportunities to the public. Don’t forget social media like Facebook and Twitter, if you have existing accounts, or participate in groups with followers.
- **Employee Programs and Corporate Responsibility** – Many local and national chains have community service and philanthropy goals, and employee volunteering is part of their culture. Some even provide a grant donation to your event if you get so many volunteers from their location. The stores listed in the table (at right) have great programs, so contact them if they are in your local area.

Stores with Employee Programs	
Best Buy	ICommit Program – Provides volunteers and grant money
Walmart	Incentive Program – Employees get paid a bonus for spending 25+ hours volunteering
Kohls	Incentive program – Provides volunteers and grant money with minimum 5 volunteers
Target	Point of Life system – Create events for free and list opportunities in their system
CVS	Online Portal – Extensive network offering volunteers and grant money

Volunteer Job Descriptions

Post clear information about roles needed in your event listing on RobotEvents. Give prospective volunteers more information than simply, “Volunteers need – please contact <person’s name>.” Fill out the Volunteer tab in RobotEvents as completely as possible, listing needed roles to spark interest. A list of the most common volunteer positions is available in the [Volunteer Roles Overview document](#), including basic skills and experience needed. For detailed volunteer role information, including responsibilities, required training and apparel, visit the [Volunteer Resources page](#) and click on the VEX IQ Challenge tab to view volunteer materials.

Volunteer Expectations

Encourage volunteers to dress comfortably and appropriately for VEX IQ Challenge events. Clothing should be team-neutral, and a polo shirt or t-shirt with jeans or dress pants is fine. Advise volunteers to wear comfortable closed-toed shoes. If you are providing volunteer t-shirts, please advise your volunteers ahead of time. Volunteers should plan to arrive at your event early enough for any on-site training (recommend 30 minutes minimum), be on time for their assignments, share a cheerful, positive attitude, and be flexible and open to helping other volunteers, if assistance is needed.

Volunteer Training and Preparation

- **Online Resources** – Please instruct all volunteers to carefully review the **Volunteer Role Guide** document and all posted training materials for their position(s) a week prior to your scheduled event. Training materials can include role guides, videos, narrated PowerPoints, and more. These can be found on the [Volunteer Resources page](#) by selecting the appropriate program tab and clicking on the volunteer position to reveal available training resources. This gives them the opportunity to ask questions and prepare before the event date.
 - **Watch Matches** – Advise them to watch matches on YouTube to get familiar with the event style. For a view of two different games, [watch this match from VEX Worlds 2016](#) and [watch this match from VEX Worlds 2015](#).
 - **Referee Training Videos** – Referees are required to watch the Referee Training Videos and to be knowledgeable about the current game rules. Referee training resources can be found posted on the [Volunteer Resources page](#) under Referee/Scorekeeper.
- **Training Calls** – Consider holding your own training calls a week prior to your event, setting expectations and giving volunteers the opportunity to ask questions.
- **Attend a Local Event** – Encourage volunteers to attend another local event if possible, to get the feel for how tournaments are run, and perhaps shadow another volunteer in their upcoming role.
- **Train Volunteers at a Skills Only Event** – If you host a Skills Only event, this is an ideal time to train volunteers and give them some hands-on experience.
- **Sensitivity Training** – Remind volunteers this is a student event where they are working with children, so do what they can to make the kids feel comfortable – like taking a knee to get down on their level, talking firmly but positively, never touching or grabbing them, and also how to be sensitive to different cultures who may be competing.
- **Onsite Orientation** – If you are able to do so, hold an in-person training session the evening before your event (often referred to as the “Night Before” event) so that volunteers can meet the volunteer team and get on-site training. Many “Night Before” events run practice matches if there is a host team or home team available to help set up. This will help build volunteers’ confidence, making the morning of your event run smooth. Whether you host training the night before, or provide training onsite the morning of your event, plan to provide volunteers with the training documentation and materials required to successfully perform their roles and enjoy their event experience. This may include printing out hard copies of Volunteer Role Overview Guides, field diagrams for reset, score sheets, etc., which can all be found on the [Event Partner Resources & Documents page](#) under the Judge/Volunteer Resources tab for your chosen program.

Volunteer Care and Appreciation

- **Food & Drink** – Make water and snacks available throughout the day and provide lunch for those who volunteer for a full event day. Hydration, food, and appropriate breaks are important to the volunteer experience. If it is possible, stop the entire competition for lunch so that ALL volunteers can take a break and eat. If you have space, set up a Volunteer Break Room or roped-off area as well.
- **Comfort** – be sure to advise your volunteers to wear comfortable shoes, bring (or provide) a water bottle, and have a few packs of lozenges in the volunteer break area to help soothe vocal cords.
- **Recognition & Certificates** – If funding is available, use t-shirts and/or name tags to identify your volunteers as a valuable event resource. Share your appreciation with your volunteers, who provide invaluable support to your efforts to make engaging VEX IQ learning experiences possible. Recognize volunteers by providing them with a Community Service Certificate that you can customize with your event name and also record individual volunteer hours – many companies and schools require documentation either to allow employees to volunteer or some may even provide an incentive for validating volunteering time. The **Community Service Certificate** for volunteers is available on the [Event Partner Resources & Documents page](#) for your chosen program under the Judge/Volunteer Resources tab. There is also a “Volunteer of the Year” trophy, included in the standard Qualifying Event Trophy Pack. You may order trophy packs as well as individual trophies and plates from VEX at <http://www.vexrobotics.com/event-partners>.
- **Tokens of Appreciation** – Even on a small budget, consider giving volunteers (or key volunteers) a small gift certificate, like \$5 to Starbucks or a local food joint.
- **Hand Written Notes** – The power of a handwritten “Thank You” goes a long way in this day and age!
- **Social Media** – If you are active on social media, consider writing a brief recommendation for a key volunteer on LinkedIn or giving a shout out on Twitter with a photo if they go above and beyond the call of duty. Tag them on Twitter along with [@REC_Foundation](#). You can also send volunteer and event photos to the REC Foundation at media@roboticseducation.org.
- **Follow Up & Keep in Touch** – Email your volunteers after the event to gauge satisfaction and collect opinions on event success, or use www.surveymonkey.com to send some short questions. Also keep in touch with volunteers for future events. If you have the budget, host a Volunteer Appreciation Dinner or Party. A happy volunteer who has a great experience will usually return!

Recommended Volunteer Staffing Plan

The following are sample volunteer staffing plans for small, medium, and large VEX IQ Challenge events. The volunteer needs for each event will vary, depending upon its size, format, and layout. Use this table only as a guideline for your volunteer recruitment and planning. Volunteers such as Inspectors, Team Check-In, Team Queuing, and Referees, can be used in dual roles in order to fully utilize their event support. For example, one volunteer can be working Team Check-In in the morning, and then transition to a Referee or Queuer once matches begin. Teams can help reset fields after each match under the supervision of the Head Referee, as can younger siblings watching the competition. Optional roles are also included for events with additional volunteer support.

Volunteer Role	Small Event (under 20 teams)	Medium Event (20-40 teams)	Large Event (over 40 teams)
Field Manager	1	1 per division	1 per division
Volunteer Coordinator	1	1	1
Team Check-In/ Info Desk*	1	2	2-3
Volunteer Check-In/ Info Desk*	1	2	2
Judge	4	2 for every 8 teams	2 for every 8 teams
Judge Advisor	1	1	1
Inspector*	2-3	3-6	6-8
Head Referee	1 moves over entire division/all fields	1 for each division	1 for each division
Referee/Scorekeeper*	2 per field	2 per field	2 per field
Skills Referee	1 per field	1-2 per field	2 per field
VEX TM Operator	1-2	2	2 per division
Queue Crew*	1-2	2-3	3-4
Field Reset***	2 per field	2 per field	2 per field
Emcee	1	1-2	1-2
Pit Admin**	1	1-2	2-3
Practice Field Official	1	1-2	2-4

* Possible dual roles

** Optional Position

*** Younger students and siblings, or teams on deck

Volunteer Scheduling Resources and Apps

There are several ways you can manage volunteers for your event online, should you wish to do so. Many smaller events do not require such tools; however, as your events grow, you may need some additional help to manage and schedule your volunteers. The majority of online apps have free basic functionality, with paid upgrade options.

- **Google Forms** – A simple way to keep track of volunteers is to use Google Forms. You can create a simple form asking basic questions like name, age, email, volunteer experience, shirt size, etc. in order to keep a database of interested volunteers you can contact.
- **Google Sheets** – You can use Google Sheets for smaller events, listing Volunteer Position, Shift Time, and Assigned Volunteer in the column headers (or some variation). You can elect to have it publicly accessible where volunteers can sign up themselves for shift times, or you can keep it private just as your own personal tracking sheet.
- **SignUp.com** – the free/basic level of this app is great for scheduling volunteers for most local events, and even some stage/regional championships. Many of our current EPs use this app: www.signup.com/volunteerspot
- **SignUpGenius.com** – The free/basic level of this app is great for scheduling volunteers for most local events, and even some stage/regional championships. Many of our current EPs use this app: <http://www.signupgenius.com>

There is also a great resource link that covers these apps and others, offers some shift scheduling tools, and also recruitment checklists, application forms, name tag templates, and more. VEX Robotics and the REC Foundation are in no way affiliated with this site, we just think it's a cool resource to share: <https://www.wildapricot.com/blogs/newsblog/2009/08/19/free-volunteer-management-software>

Sharing Best Practices

At the REC Foundation EP Summit we discuss and share best practices for managing volunteers. Here are several that resonated with everyone:

Volunteer Recruitment

- Share Head Refs with EPs of nearby events. Check out event map on RobotEvents.com.
- If short, use the power of the mic to recruit help. “Looking for a few smiling faces to help us out!”
- If abundant, don’t turn volunteers away! Use them as relief/floaters.
- Consider adding a requirement to participate in League Play:
 - Every team has to provide five volunteers, or...
 - Every member of a team must volunteer for one or more events.
- Partner with school Club Advisors. Volunteering is an easy way to earn service hours for both the club members and the club as a whole.
- Inquire with local Religious schools and Catholic Educational Institutions. May require parents to do community service in lieu of tuition.

Volunteer Appreciation

- As a Thank You, make a collage of photos from the event in Shutterfly or equivalent online service, have the kids write a personal message (yearbook style), and print them out to send to volunteers.
- If you want to encourage volunteers to “move up the ranks,” provide a badge or button they can wear, based on experience and how many events they have attended.

Volunteer Training

- Have a Succession Plan for Key Volunteers. Younger students can shadow/learn. Train a minion!
- Encourage volunteers to attend multiple events. Now that they have the process down.

Event Setup and Tear Down

- Add volunteer roles for “Setup Crew.” It’s best to have 6-8 adults, and plentiful students helping. ROTC and local Civil Air Patrol are fantastic at helping set up (give them a table at your event).
- Pre-stage materials in advance. For example, start massing tiles, etc.
- For Setup Day:
 - If possible, set up the day before the event! There is rarely enough time to set up an event the morning of the tournament.
 - Have two people set up Tournament Manager.
 - Have two people running cables.
 - Have one adult and two kids constructing each field.
 - Use power tools.
 - Appoint a head/leader in charge of each area: Pits, Floor pieces, Concession stand, etc.
 - Be sure to test the TM computer, all field electronics, projectors, printer, etc. before leaving; everything should be fully functional and ready to go!
- Make it mandatory for the kids to stay after school on the night before a tournament to help set up.
- Seven days before your event, email all school club advisors to provide two volunteers.
- For Tear Down:
 - Utilize parents sitting in bleachers. They have “fresh legs” and can help.
 - Partner with other host teams. Have them help with your event tear down, and you help with theirs.
 - Any school club needing service hours can help with tear down. They don’t need any VEX experience, just willingness to help.