



VIPs

Overview

The purpose of the VIP program is to develop and cultivate contacts, co-ordinate special activities, and make connections among individuals who will help grow *FIRST* and help support and grow teams and events in your region.

As you begin planning your VIP program, it is important to identify your criteria as to what distinguishes a person as a “VIP”. Overall, VIPs should include high-level and high-profile individuals that can help facilitate future growth of your Regional. VIPs may be senior executives from organizations that sponsor your event or from prospective sponsors for future Competitions. *FIRST* may recommend individuals in your region who are involved with *FIRST* in high-profile ways (e.g. representatives from Founding Sponsor companies or contributors to the *FIRST* Annual Fund), and including these people on your VIP list is appropriate. There may be regional “leaders/luminaries/celebrities” (e.g. politicians, astronauts, well-known educators, scientists, etc.), and you should review your VIP criteria to see if including these people on your VIP list will bring attention and momentum to your event. Senior administrators from the local K-12 education system, such as School Board Presidents, Superintendents, District Science and/or Technology Supervisors, as well as leaders from 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities in the region also are valuable to include as VIPs. The local chairs of professional organizations like ASME, IEEE, NSBE, SME, SWE, etc., are likely to be wonderful resources for your Regional Committee, and should be considered as potential VIP activity co-sponsors and/or VIP guests.

VIP Reception Coordinator

Your planning committee should designate a VIP Reception Coordinator to lead responsibilities for the VIP program. The duties of this volunteer are fully outlined in Section 1, Planning Committee. This individual will work with the Regional Committee to set criteria for VIP designation and to develop the VIP strategy, including any VIP activities/events.

Once you have determined the criteria for a VIP designation, the Coordinator will determine what strategy to use to attract VIPs to the regional event and what activities to plan for VIPs on site. You need to determine whether or not you want to host “VIP Tours” of the event, a luncheon/dinner or a reception, or some other activity, and you will want to assess which day(s) time(s) to offer special VIP opportunities. The Planning Timeline indicates the time frames in which to carry out VIP-related activities. Your *FIRST* Regional Director will also help in developing VIP goals, strategies and implementation.

VIP Invitations and RSVPs

The VIP Reception Coordinator will develop and maintain your VIP invitation list; develop, print, and mail out VIP invitations/letters outlining your VIP program; make follow up calls to get VIPs to the event, and track RSVPs. For samples of VIP invitations that have been used for other events, or to inquire about availability of invitation templates from *FIRST*, contact your *FIRST* Regional Director. Throughout this process, it is important that the Coordinator keep a complete and accurate electronic version of your VIP list, including the full name, title, company name and address, phone, and email contact information for each invited VIP. It is important that this list be stored for use the following year, so that continuity can be maintained. Since the goal of your VIP activity is to gather the complete contact information for all those who can help your efforts, this comprehensive and accurate list of what VIPs participate in your event activities is critical for your follow-up efforts. The VIP Reception Coordinator will be asked to forward an electronic copy of your regional VIP list to *FIRST* for incorporation into the master VIP contact list. A request from *FIRST* for your regional list may be made at any time prior to or following the event.

Should you have questions about how to compile your VIP list, contact *Vice President of Development* (refer to Introduction section for contact information).



VIPs On-site

The VIP Reception Coordinator functions as an on-site VIP contact during the regional Competition. *FIRST* recommends having a volunteer-staffed VIP check-in/registration desk where all VIPs can be welcomed, registered, given a VIP badge, and briefed on the schedule of VIP activities and benefits of being a VIP. This could include volunteer and/or student escorts to guide the VIP to a specific seating area or to a reception area, or it could include media opportunities scheduled around particularly high-profile VIPs. Your VIP Reception Coordinator will have briefed the check-in desk volunteers. The most important thing is to have a well-marked registration area, with volunteers who are friendly, helpful and able to communicate well with VIPs. These individuals should be well versed in the mission and goals of *FIRST* and in the basics of the Competition. Since some VIPs will be newcomers to *FIRST*, it is critical that their VIP experience be catalytic. It is also extremely important to keep an accurate list of those who register on site as VIPs, cross-referencing this on-site sign-in list with your original invitation list. You will find that some of those you have invited may not attend, and there may be guests of invited VIPs that do come to the event and register as VIPs on site. You will want to capture contact information for these people. Because the goal of your VIP activity is to gather the complete contact information for all those who can help your efforts, a comprehensive and accurate list of all VIPs who participate in your event is critical for your follow-up efforts. On-site activities for VIPs vary around the regionals; for any additional information about how to plan a successful VIP program, contact your Regional Director.

Sample VIP Strategies and Styles

Regionals have experimented with various strategies for inviting VIPs to their events:

- 1) The 'rifle shot' approach, where a very limited number of VIPs are identified and given personal invitations, usually by another high level VIP who is already a *FIRST* supporter.
- 2) The 'shot-gun' approach where a very large list, compiled from every source possible, is invited in the hope that a percentage will attend.
- 3) A variation of the 'shot-gun' approach where the invitation is issued in the name of a group of local high level *FIRST* supporters who have name recognition. " Mr XXX, CEO of ABC Corp and Ms YYY CFO of DEF Corp invite you join them at the *FIRST* Robotics Competition (**Your event name here**) Regional". With this style, Mr. XXX and Ms. YYY must actually be there to meet the invitees.
- 4) An 'education' event where the local School Boards, Superintendents and Principals are invited. They can be invited to bring their teachers and classes to the event, but this does tend to limit it to the Friday.
- 5) A Saturday midday timing is the most common for VIP events, but some have been held on Friday and some on both days.

The various type of events that have been run successfully have included:

- 1) A formal sit-down lunch with invited speakers. This can be an important person whom the VIPs would like to hear. The State Governor is ideal, for example. Also, using team members and mentors to talk to the group is very successful.
- 2) A buffet brunch from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. where visitors can be flexible when they arrive. This works best when it can be held in a location from which the event can be viewed.