

A Brief History of the Utah For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST) Robotics Competition (FRC)

FIRST, a not-for-profit 501c(3), was founded in 1989 in New Hampshire by Dean Kamen in order to "... inspire young people's interest and participation in science and technology." The "public charity designs accessible, innovative programs that motivate young people to pursue education and career opportunities in science, technology, engineering and math, while building self-confidence, knowledge, and life skills." The FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC) for youth in 9th – 12th grades was the first program the fledging organization created. Since then, FIRST has designed three additional levels creating a suite of programs for children, beginning with FIRST Lego League Junior (K-3rd grade), FIRST Lego League (4th – 9th grade), FIRST Tech Challenge (7th – 12th grade) and culminating in FIRST Robotics Competition, (9th – 12th grades).

Recognizing the importance of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education, parents, educators, industry, and government are providing access to FIRST programs across the country for youth of all ages. FIRST is now in all 50 states and over 80 countries. Utah is one of the most recent, with early adopter FRC teams competing in the early 2000s from Blanding, Salt Lake City, Logan and Woods Cross.

At about this same time, engineering faculty at the University of Utah were developing a National Science Foundation grant to develop the Robotics Track at the University of Utah. As part of this effort, the faculty decided to support outreach activities allied with FIRST programs since they were so well structured and matched the goals of the University.

Richard Anderson, a retired technology teacher from Idaho Falls, became the FIRST regional director for the surrounding states and worked closely with University of Utah faculty, community members and the Utah Governor's Office of Economic Development to launch the inaugural FIRST Robotics Competition in Utah in 2010. This allowed teams across the Intermountain West to have their own local event, enabling more people in the region to participate. University of Utah faculty have led the FRC organizing committee ever since.

While FLL Jr., FLL, and FTC strive to get kids excited about innovation and STEM at a young age, FRC aims to hook them for life. FRC uses commercial-grade industrial automation tools combined with exciting games to make robotics a tech venture sport that is as enthralling and captivating as major league sports. While some kids dream of being NBA players, we want kids to dream of being great science and technology leaders who will make the world a better place.