Funding

Planning a Budget

To ensure a positive experience and the long-term viability of a team, spending must be planned carefully. It is important to know how much money will be needed for the season and how it will be gathered. In addition to the need to plan spending carefully, Sponsors may ask how money will be allocated, and it is important to be able to give them a clear answer. Teams should keep all receipts and records of purchases in an organized manner for easy reference when necessary.

Creating a budget will simplify goal setting for fundraising and sponsorship efforts. Many of the costs listed here can be subsidized with in-kind and monetary donations.

Note: Be sure to budget for advancement to the World Championship. Some teams receive their invitation very late in the season and it can be a challenge to raise the necessary funds in a short time frame.

Sample Budget

Below is a sample of estimated expenses, based on estimated 2011 costs and assuming no in-kind donations, such as goods or services. Most of these will vary, based on individual team situations. Costs have been estimated in USD. Use the column on the right to record actual costs throughout the season, in order to more accurately estimate a budget for the following year.

Item	Anticipated/ Approximate Cost	Actual Cost
FTC® team registration fee	$275	
FTC Competition Kit with LEGO® MINDSTORMS®	$650	
FTC Competition Kit without LEGO MINDSTORMS	$450	
Yearly seasonal upgrades	Costs will vary based on what is available to re-use from previous years, and yearly requirements.	
FTC Software Renewal Kit (LabVIEW)	$0	
FTC Software Renewal Kit (ROBOTC®)	$50 - $249 Costs will vary based on licensing options.	
FTC Resource Kit	$199	
Samantha Module	$50	
Tournament registration fees	$0 - $300 Costs for tournaments are determined by the FTC Partner.	
Regional travel, lodging, food	$500 Costs will vary with the distance to the event and the number of people attending.	
Supplies, storage containers, cart	$500 Costs will vary based on what is available to re-use from previous years, and yearly requirements.	
Practice field and game elements	Costs will vary based on what is available to re-use from previous years, and yearly requirements.	
Team t-shirts, pins, etc.	$150 - $200 (Optional)	
Pit Decorations	$200 Costs will vary based on what is available to re-use from previous years, and yearly requirements.	
Miscellaneous Costs (e.g., snacks, office supplies, etc.)	Costs will vary with the distance to the event, and the number of people attending.	

Item	Anticipated/ Approximate Cost	Actual Cost
Championship registration fee	$1,000	
Championship travel, lodging, food	$1,500 - $2,000 Costs will vary with the distance to the event, and the number of people attending.	
	Total Cost:	

Ordering Components
Make sure to inventory parts before the season begins, and at regular intervals throughout the season. This will help to cut back on unnecessary spending and avoid expedited shipping charges when parts are needed at the last minute.

During competitions or testing, it is likely that robot parts will need to be replaced. Motors may burn out or sensors may be damaged. Try to order in larger quantities, when possible, to ensure that a specific part will always be available when it is needed, or to try out optional ideas when building.

Ordering Extra Components
Order at least one of every available part, or more if your budget allows. Over the season there will be changes made to the robot. It is a good idea to have different materials to experiment with, without having to wait for them to be shipped. There are often multiple approaches to a problem and having all parts on hand will allow for immediate testing and experimentation.

Gathering Funding and Support

Many teams will need to do some form of fundraising to pay for participation in FTC®. This can be challenging, but it can also be a unifying and empowering experience for young people.

1. Personal Funding
Individuals can fund teams using personal funds or divide the costs between team members.

Note: A requirement of contributing to the team's costs may be a considerable expense for some Mentors or families, which can potentially exclude eager Volunteers and students from participation.

2. Sponsorship
In addition to relieving financial pressure, seeking a Sponsor and general fundraising can spread awareness of FTC and develop support for *FIRST®* in the community. Start by looking for a local company to sponsor the team.

Use fundraising as an opportunity to strengthen a team's speaking and presentation skills. Students may feel a vested interest in the funding of their team when they are directly responsible for soliciting businesses for funds. They can create their own marketing materials, such as PowerPoint presentations and display boards. These materials should include information about the team, and realistic goals that the team would like to achieve during their season.

Reasons Why a Company Should Sponsor an FTC Team:
- Funding FTC teams encourages a talented future workforce.
- Sponsors help to develop the community in which they exist by providing for positive experiences for young people.
- Sponsorship creates and enhances awareness of the company in the local community.
- Companies can add their logo on to team banners or T-shirts.

Finding a Sponsor
- Call local businesses and offer to come and discuss the team.
- Ask for a donation of funding or services to support the team.
- Offer to put sponsor logos and stickers on the robot, pit banner, etc.
- Invite Sponsors to visit the team and give a presentation about what their organization does.
- Have students prepare a 10 – 15 minute presentation that emphasises the educational value of robotics. Demonstrate a robot if possible and let one of the Sponsors drive for a brief period of time.
- Create a one-page flyer or small team profile package to give to the Sponsor.

Maintaining Sponsor Relationships
- If a Sponsor asks, be prepared to explain how donations are being used.
- Update donors or Sponsors regularly and remind them how their contribution helps to inspire a life-long appreciation for science and technology, as well as lasting intellectual and life skills.
- Encourage Sponsors to come to events when possible.
- Create a video on DVD to show the team in action and how the Sponsor's donation helped the team.
- Write a thank you letter to every Sponsor, no matter how small their contribution.

3. Fundraising

Team fundraising builds unity and develops enthusiasm for success. In addition to the obvious monetary benefit, it also fosters a sense of ownership in the team. Choosing a fundraiser that is appropriate for a team and its community can be the difference between a mediocre result and a great one. Team members should brainstorm for creative fundraising ideas early in the season, or search online to find both traditional and innovative ideas.

Tips for Fundraising
- Always be sure that the host organization approves the chosen fundraiser.
- To be more original, make and sell items that complement the community.
- Make it fun! The more fun the fundraiser is, the more donors will want to be part of the excitement.
- Think of fundraising ideas that do not require additional Volunteers, or a greater time commitment.
- Ask community groups to support the team in any way they can. A number of major retail franchises may match money raised at their sites, while others may offer community groups free or discounted products. Be sure to call local businesses and ask them what they might do to help. Every little bit raised is helpful!
- Visit local businesses and companies to grow the program in the area and bring community awareness for the team. $100 from ten businesses might be easier to attain than $1,000 from one Sponsor.
- Several small fundraisers are easier to coordinate than a single large one.

4. Non-cash donations:
- Sponsors can provide technical or non-technical Mentors for the team.
- Services like laser-cutting, CNC machining, graphics work for robot or pit decorations, food, t-shirts, materials, office supplies, copying services, etc. are all valuable donations.
- Discounts on goods and services can be very helpful to teams.
- Sponsors can make a space donation for meetings or to house a practice competition field.
- Used laptops, computers, filing cabinets to organize workspace, old office furniture for work tables, etc. are all useful