

Being one of the only Black members on my robotics team, diversity and inclusion have always been important to me. I strove to make my FIRST Robotics team more inclusive, inviting my friends to attend meetings whenever I could. Two years ago, I was appointed Chief of Operations on Wingspan, placing me in charge of both *Recruitment & Retention* and *Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion*. Here, I continually worked on making our corner of FIRST robotics completely inclusive.

I learned that working with a diverse group of people requires meeting everyone where they are. I often recruited people who were LGBTQ+ or women/female-presenting and had little to no experience in robotics. Most of them confided in me that they'd never felt they were allowed to enter a STEM environment before. Before we started on our projects for the year, I made sure everyone had fun and felt confident in their abilities by working with them on introductory activities: designing team merchandise and coming up with a creative theme for the year. I wanted to build them up and give them a space where they could feel safe enough to try new things. Even then, I saw the value in having so many diverse perspectives to hear from; they each had innovative ideas and fresh ways of thinking.

Meeting people where they were allowed me to build them up, gradually introducing them to skills and concepts they were unfamiliar with. I helped them develop the confidence to share their ideas in front of groups of people, increasing their communication and public speaking abilities. I sat with them as they wrote content for our team's competition handouts, watching as they improved their technical writing skills. Earlier this year, a first-year member told me she was interested in creating a STEM presentation for children, so I guided her to resources where she could build an outreach event for them. One month and five emails later, I volunteered at the event she hosted, teaching five- to seven-year-olds how to build toy robots from recycled materials. I was able to watch first-hand not only the impact joining the team had on her, but also the impact she had on the children as they raced their robots with one another.

Working in diverse groups has taught me that sometimes, people just need to be given encouragement and the space to grow to become the best versions of themselves. When people feel accepted and valued at every stage of the learning process, they become empowered by their knowledge. There's nothing more valuable than the ability to make someone feel welcome.