

## **Funding Inside the School Ecosystem**

### **Meeting Summary & Key Takeaways**

**Date:** August 4, 2026\*\*

**Duration:** 1 hour, 5 minutes

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#### **Overview**

This session served as an open forum for FIRST Washington school-based FRC and FTC teams to discuss fundraising challenges, district constraints, and the evolving funding model following the loss of OSPI support. Leaders and mentors from across Washington shared experiences, concerns, and strategies for sustaining robotics programs in their schools.

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#### **Introductions**

Participants represented a wide range of FRC and FTC teams from Chehalis, Kent, Wapato, Mount Vernon, Snohomish, Sammamish, South Seattle, Bellevue, Anacortes, Puyallup, and more. Roles included lead mentors, assistant coaches, booster club officers, CTE-aligned educators, and FIRST Washington leadership.

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#### **Key Discussion Themes**

##### **Funding Model Changes**

- FIRST WA historically charged teams a “fully loaded” invoice but fundraised to reduce actual costs.
- OSPI funding previously reduced or eliminated fees for many school-based teams.
- With OSPI gone, FIRST WA must charge full fees upfront while fundraising separately to re-grant teams.
- Teams expressed concern about paying nearly double what other districts pay.
- FIRST WA is running a \$500,000 fundraising campaign to stabilize team support.

##### **School District Constraints**

- Many districts require board approval for donations over \$10,000.

- Some districts avoid this through CTE-managed robotics programs.
- Booster clubs vary widely: some dissolved during COVID, some are rebuilding, others are strong.
- Purchasing challenges include slow PO turnaround and vendor limitations.

### **Budget Realities**

- FTC budgets typically range from \$6,000–\$15,000.
  - FRC budgets range from \$25,000 to over \$100,000 depending on travel and equipment.
  - Teams emphasized the need for predictable funding to maintain access and program quality.
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### **Shared Strategies**

- Submit open POs early in the school year.
  - Maintain strong communication with CTE directors and building leadership.
  - Use ASB accounts for grants and booster clubs for flexible purchases.
  - Build multi-year fundraising plans and diversify funding sources.
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### **Equity & Access**

FIRST WA leadership emphasized:

- Protecting small and rural teams from collapse.
  - Maintaining statewide access for 10,000+ students.
  - Preserving the volunteer ecosystem of 3,000+ mentors and event staff.
  - Continuing advocacy with OSPI and the Governor for restored funding.
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### **Key Takeaways**

- The funding landscape has shifted: teams must prepare for more local fundraising.
- FIRST WA is committed to re-granting teams as fundraising allows.

- District policies significantly impact team operations and fundraising.
  - Collaboration and shared strategies across teams are essential.
  - Equity remains a core priority for sustaining robotics access statewide.
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### **Suggested Next Steps**

#### **For FIRST WA:**

- Provide fundraising toolkits and sponsor prospect lists.
- Offer templates for district-friendly grant requests.
- Support teams in forming or rebuilding booster clubs.

#### **For Teams:**

- Share district-specific constraints.
  - Identify local sponsors and mentors.
  - Build multi-year fundraising plans.
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### **Closing**

This session highlighted the challenges and opportunities facing school-based robotics teams in Washington. Through collaboration, advocacy, and strategic fundraising, teams and FIRST WA can continue delivering high-impact STEM experiences to students across the state.