Community Networking in Five Easy Steps!
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Among all the great attributes of the *FIRST* experience, is the emphasis on teamwork, and that includes learning how to build your team of coaches, mentors and community supporters. The fact is, the more recognition teams have in their communities, the more support they can count on – from funding to mentoring.   There are lots of ways to build a supportive local FIRST community, but here are five easy steps to get you started.

1 .Take Stock of Your Neighborhood!
Whether you're meeting at a school, a community center, or a private home, go to Google maps (or something similar), type in your physical address and then "search nearby" on any combination of "robotics", "mechanical engineering", "computer engineering", tech businesses, or industry. Look for universities, colleges and technical or vocational schools that might have an engineering component.

Drill down to find websites, email addresses and phone numbers of nearby businesses and educational facilities. Consider businesses that might be able to provide funding or sponsorship, even if they aren't engineering or robotics related. T-shirt companies and printers can make very helpful friends and supporters. And local eateries might be willing to provide team snacks! Don't overlook local chapters of groups like the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, IEEE, Manufacturing associations, retired engineers groups or software user groups, too.

2. Market Your Team
- If you don't have a website, make one! A free blog is perfectly sufficient.
- Create an informative and attractive team packet featuring information about FIRST (check the FIRST website for resources) , team members and your needs.
- Keep an introductory letter on hand that can be emailed or included with the packet, that introduces your team and invites specific in-kind or financial help and support.
- Send out PSAs (Public Service Announcements) to local newspapers and other media about upcoming events and appearances.

3. Say Hello!
Send a note of introduction to everyone on your new list. Include:
- Photo of team,
- Exactly what you're looking for: mentors, money, space, materials,
- Your team packet with interesting team and FIRST robotics information

Be open to all types of help! Support can include:
- opening businesses or research facilities up to team field trips
- tutoring or mentoring help in any of a number of fields, ranging from computer programming, to building and design, general robotics instruction, team presentations
- coaching support
- team sponsorship
- donations for registration, kit or competition fees
- materials support and more.

4. Follow Up!
Wait a couple of weeks and then follow up with a second letter, email or phone call. Rinse and Repeat as needed. Be sure to let those you reach out to know that your team is happy to come visit, do demos, and talk to staff and personnel.

5. Be Gracious!
Be prompt, polite and profuse in your gratitude for any and all support you receive. Make it a point to thank sponsors, donors and mentors on your team website, identify sponsors on your team shirts, in team literature and on your robot, if possible.

Team members should write or sign thank you notes with a team photo on them. Update sponsors, mentors and supporters often and mention them regularly to others. Gratitude goes a long way towards encouraging others to support you, too. Exhibiting gracious professionalism in your community, as well as at competitions, can net your team long term and enduring support for years to come!