



BEST PRACTICES FROM

Anita Beining, *Indiana*

Anita Beining is a teacher, coach, and Event Partner supporting elementary, middle, and high school teams through Aerial Drone & Robotics events. She coordinates volunteers, mentors teams, and builds community partnerships.

Positive Experience Over Competition

Teams remember how they were treated.

- Greet warmly and create a welcoming tournament environment
- Encourage good sportsmanship at all times
- Keep the focus on students and their experience

Communicate Early & Often

Send key details before event day to reduce stress.

- Arrival times and check-in details
- Parking instructions
- inspection process and timing
- Concession information and availability

Empower Your Volunteers

Volunteers are the heart of the event.

- Give clear roles and expectations
- Provide quick, simple training before the event begins
- Supply written instructions or checklists for reference
- Offer ongoing support throughout the event

Walk the Team Perspective

Think through the event from a team's point of view.

- Walk through arrival, unloading, and check-in
- Consider pit setup and flow
- Plan inspection timing and process
- Focus on small details that make the event feel organized and smooth

Maintain a Flexible Plan for Problems

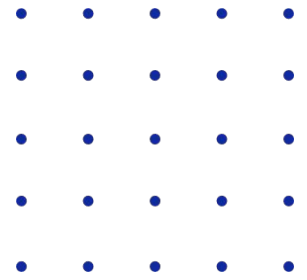
Expect adjustments and plan for them in advance.

- Build in buffer time throughout the schedule
- Identify backup volunteers for key roles
- Keep essential supplies easily accessible
- Stay calm and adapt quickly when changes are needed



BEST PRACTICES FROM

Kimberly Henry, *Texas*



Kimberly Henry leads innovative STEM initiatives through JROTC in Plano ISD. She has expanded student opportunities by integrating robotics, engineering, aerial drones, and emerging technologies while developing dedicated STEM learning spaces. As a REC Foundation Event Partner, she organizes major competitions, including the South Central Aerial Drone Championship. Kimberly is passionate about building partnerships that inspire the next generation of STEM leaders.

Plan with Purpose

- Start planning 4–6 months in advance.
- Develop a detailed timeline with milestone deadlines.
- Build a planning team and clearly define responsibilities.
- Prepare contingency plans for equipment, weather, and volunteers.



Build a Strong Volunteer Team

- Recruit volunteers early and assign specific roles.
- Train volunteers well before event day.
- Empower leaders to make decisions.
- Recognize and appreciate volunteers—they are key to your success.



Focus on the Student Experience

- Create a welcoming and organized environment.
- Keep communication clear for teams and coaches.
- Minimize downtime with a well-managed schedule.
- Celebrate teamwork, perseverance, and innovation—not just awards.

Build Strong Community Partnerships

- Engage local businesses and industry partners.
- Invite colleges and STEM organizations to participate.
- Leverage sponsors to enhance the student experience.
- Recognize partners and volunteers before, during, and after the event.

Always Conduct an AAR - After Action Review

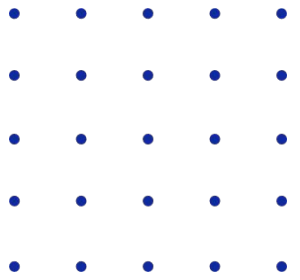
- Conduct an after-action review with your team.
- Collect feedback from coaches, volunteers, and students.
- Document lessons learned for future events.
- Build partnerships that strengthen future competitions.





BEST PRACTICES FROM

Fritz Hodges, *South Carolina*



Fritz Hodges is an Army JROTC Instructor at Timberland High School and a 20-year Army veteran who served as a Satellite Communications Specialist. In the Aerial Drone Competition community, he has worked as a coach and Event Partner, emphasizing preparation, communication, and continuous learning to create successful events and positive experiences. This season, his Timberland teams competed at the 4th Brigade Best of the Best, Southeast Regional Championship, and All-Services level.

Prepare Before Event Day

- A successful event starts before teams arrive.
- Test the full event process in advance.
- Run a mock meet, check all technology, and ensure scoring systems and displays work properly.
- Train volunteer referees ahead of time to build confidence and reduce issues on event day.

Communicate with Teams Early

- One of the best ways to reduce stress on event day is to give teams the information they need in advance.
- Share maps, parking directions, and event locations, along with the opening brief so coaches understand the schedule, expectations, and flow of the day.

Prepare Judging Materials in Advance

- One of the most effective practices I used this year was preparing detailed binders for the Judge Advisor and judging teams before the event.
- Pre-fill forms, assign teams in advance, and ensure materials are ready for quick distribution to improve fairness, consistency, and efficiency.

Think Through the Team Experience

- Design the event from the perspective of students and coaches.
- Clearly label team areas, provide power access, and offer loaner equipment to reduce stress and allow teams to focus on competition.

Use Dependable Support Personnel

- Having the right people in the right place make a major difference.
- Assign reliable support staff to manage check-in and queues.
- This keeps teams moving smoothly and allows key leaders to focus on higher-level event operations and overall event success.



BEST PRACTICES FROM

Tony Leatualevao, *American Samoa*

Tony Leatualevao is the Program Director in the Technology Integration Division of the American Samoa Department of Education (ASDOE). Supported and helped host the first-ever drone competition in American Samoa, creating an engaging STEM learning opportunity for students across the territory. The event brought together 56 teams from 28 elementary and high schools.

Provide Multiple Training Sessions

- Train referees, judges, and tech coordinators to ensure consistent rule knowledge and confidence.
- Prepare officials to effectively handle unexpected competition situations.
- Include school teams in practice sessions to simulate real competition scenarios and improve event readiness.

Establish Clear Communication with Coaches

- Provide timely updates, expectations, and event information to support team preparation.
- Ensure coaches are aligned on schedules, procedures, and requirements.
- Reduce confusion, last-minute issues, and misunderstandings through consistent communication.

Prepare and Test Everything the Day Before

- Complete setup and test all equipment before competition day.
- Verify that technology and materials are functioning properly.
- Identify and resolve issues early to ensure a smooth event.

Choose Trusted and Reliable Volunteers

- Recruit dependable volunteers who are responsible, attentive, and follow instructions.
- Select individuals who contribute to a smooth and professional event.
- Consider recruiting trusted family members, colleagues, and other reliable supporters.

Create a Welcoming Competition Environment

- Greet teams and coaches as they arrive.
- Provide a friendly and organized check-in experience.
- Ensure volunteers are welcoming and encouraging to all teams.



BEST PRACTICES FROM

Nicki Manion, *Indiana*

Nicki Manion is a classroom mathematics educator and the Founder and Executive Director of Community Education Partners, Inc. With more than 25 years of experience in education, she is passionate about building partnerships that connect schools, nonprofits, businesses, and communities to expand educational opportunities and create lasting impact.

My Flight Experience

I started as a first-time Event Partner and have since hosted **three qualifying events, a scrimmage, a Signature Event, and a Southeast Regional**.

Each event has helped me learn, adapt, and find better ways to support teams and volunteers.

Flight Simulation Before Launch

Host a scrimmage or shadow an experienced Event Partner if possible.

Attend an event from the EP perspective—not just as a spectator—to learn logistics, systems, and what happens behind the scenes.

Build Your Flight Crew

Don't fly solo.

Lean on experienced Event Partners, REC Foundation staff, and your volunteer team for support and guidance.

Navigate Turbulence & Review Your Flight Log

Things won't always go as planned.

Stay flexible, keep the focus on students, and take notes after each event to improve your next mission.

Need a Co-Pilot?

I'm happy to support new Event Partners!

Think of me as your event planner/co-pilot. If you're within driving distance, I can come help in person, or I'm open to flying in. I can bring equipment and provide hands-on support to help your event take off.

Reach out if you'd like to connect!