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Introduction

What is a local alliance?

Similar to alliances in matches, a local alliance is a collection of teams that work together towards a goal. The goals, structure, and operations of an alliance may shift depending on what the member teams desire from the alliance. It embodies the ethos of Gracious Professionalism and Coopertition to develop a more formalized support structure across multiple teams.

Why should I create an alliance?

Being a member of an alliance provides a multitude of benefits, such as access to additional points of view, advocating leverage, additional resources, etc. However, alliances may also come with setbacks. Read below to see if starting a local alliance would work for you.

Meet the Bellevue Alliance



The Bellevue Alliance is an alliance of the seven FRC teams based in Bellevue, Washington.

Members

492 - Titan Robotics - International School
948 - Newport Robotics Group - Newport HS
949 - Wolverine Robotics - Bellevue HS
1899 - Saints Robotics - Interlake HS
2412 - Robototes - Sammamish HS
7461 - Sushi Squad - Community Team
9036 - Ramen Robotics - Big Picture School

About the Bellevue Alliance

History

The Bellevue Alliance (BA) was initiated in 2017 by the Robototes (Team 2412) and Saints Robotics (Team 1899). The initial alliance consisted of 492, 948, 949, 1899, and 2412. Each Bellevue Alliance team struggled in its own way, so we came together to discuss what was happening. We used the shared power of our voices to advocate for shop space for robotics teams within the Bellevue School District. In February 2022, Sushi Squad (7461) joined the BA as a community team. Ramen Robotics (9036) joined the BA in the summer of 2022 as a brand new rookie team from Bellevue Big Picture School.



Mission Statement

The Bellevue Alliance aims to network between teams and share resources to create a safe and fun community to grow and strengthen all robotics teams in Bellevue.

Vision Statement

Our vision is a FIRST community where collaboration between local teams and support for struggling teams is a fundamental aspect of its culture.

Leadership Structure

Each team delegates two members to be BA representatives for the school year. Representatives will be responsible for attending BA meetings on behalf of their respective team and communicating all BA decisions and conversations with the rest of their team.

From each team's pair of representatives, the team will choose one representative for the BA Board. Once each team nominates board members, the board members decide amongst themselves which positions they would like to take on. They will have additional responsibilities to ensure the maintenance and sustainability of the BA. The board currently has three roles filled by two people, each with one shadowing position. Each position has a varying level of commitment to tailor to the different limitations of board members.

Heads of Operations (2)

- BA's external point of contact (If seeking to contact the BA, reach out to these people)
- Solicits input for agenda + Leads BA Meetings
- Helps with making sure info is properly distributed
- Acts as the overseers of the BA

Heads of Documentation (2)

- Takes notes at meetings
- Distributes information (ex. Sending notes to mentors + Discord after BA meeting)

Heads of Marketing (2)

- Runs the Instagram
- Updates the website
- Markets events/programs etc.

Shadow (1)

- Helps where needed (ex. Ramen Robotics is shadowing as a Rookie team during the 2022-2023 season)

Eligibility

In order for teams to be a member of the Bellevue Alliance, they must be an FRC team affiliated with the Bellevue School District or have a shop space in Bellevue. They must also remain an active member of the Bellevue Alliance by adhering to the expectations listed below.

Expectations

We are flexible with expectations and allow teams to increase/decrease their presence depending on what is within their capabilities for the year.

- We commit to embracing Coopertition and helping all BA teams to the best of each team's ability.
- We commit to sending at least one representative for our team to each regularly scheduled meeting.

Communications

We use Discord for general communication and unofficial discussions. We use email as the official communication platform between the BA, mentors, and advisors and commit to updating them after each BA meeting.

Meetings

The Bellevue Alliance meets regularly to update each other on their team's recent progress as well as discuss relevant upcoming events, issues, or concerns. We meet once a month, alternating through the various teams' workshops.

Running Meetings:

- 1) Decide on a host team – they are responsible for getting access to the meeting location and organizing a time and date for the meeting (we typically use when2meet). We cycle through each of our seven teams as meeting hosts and aim to determine the following meeting times close to the end of each BA meeting.
- 2) The Heads of Operations will write the meeting agenda before the meeting
- 3) Each team will send 2-3 representatives to attend the meeting (at least one rep per team should be present).
- 4) The Heads of Operations will run the meeting, typically in a round-robin fashion to get information from each team.
- 5) The Heads of Documentation will take notes during the meeting in Google drive using the template.
- 6) Before ending the meeting, decide on who is responsible for hosting the next meeting.
- 7) Following the meeting, the Heads of Documentation will clean up the notes and send out the action items with the meeting notes to Discord and via email to the mentors.
- 8) Fun activities: sometimes, we will go out or do shop tours for fun at the end of meetings.

Projects

- **Wolverine Robotics Revamp (2019)**
 - When the BA was just getting started, Wolverine Robotics was struggling. They had 0 mentors, lost control over their space, and lacked sufficient funding.
 - The head mentor of the Robototes moved to coach Wolverine Robotics. The other BA teams worked to advocate for their space.
- **Shop Space Advocacy (2017)**
 - Even in the BA's early days, we advocated for better work environments and compensation for our staff. Within the school district, we were able to get our staff advisors paid a coach's salary and attain shop spaces with increased flexibility. This increased flexibility was intended to allow access to shop space during midwinter break, for longer hours during build season, and the ability to use more tools.
 - The BA worked together to meet and advocate for these changes in front of the school board, district officials, among others.

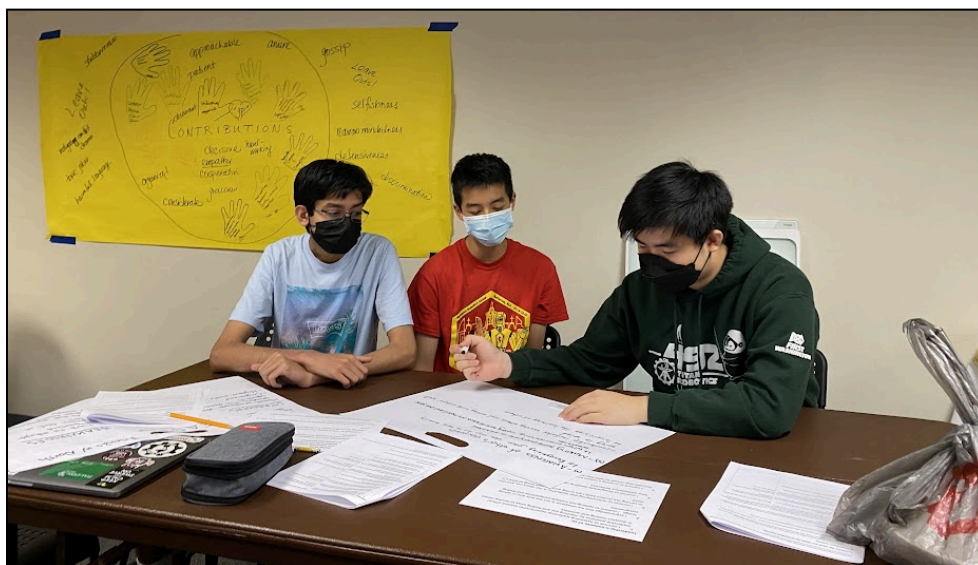
- **BA Podcast Episodes (2021)**

- The BA joined Saints Robotics on their podcast, where they talked about the growth and creation of the BA, as well as the impact that the BA has had on its member teams.



- **BA Leadership Training (2022)**

- NRG hosted leadership training sessions for the entirety of the Bellevue Alliance. This included three sessions on curriculum training as well as a meeting on how to be a leader. These lessons utilized NRG's staff advisor and ASB teachers' experience as educators. This allowed various leadership members to get introduced to others while developing their leadership skills.



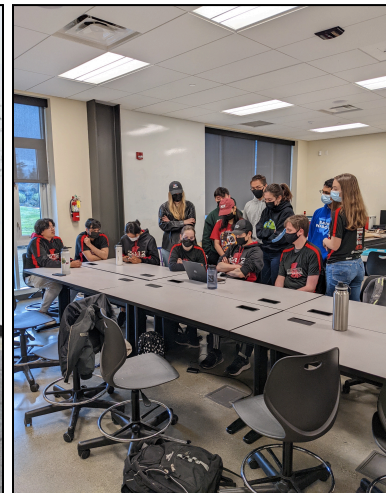
- **BA Mock Kickoff (2022)**

- The Bellevue Alliance hosted a mock kickoff event before off-season competitions to help train rookie members and our rookie team, Ramen Robotics, about FIRST Robotics. We explained what FIRST is and what games look like.
- This event allowed different teams to share their kickoff processes and allowed the rookies to meet new people and collaborate in large groups.



- **Ongoing – FAIR Bill (For Access to Innovation in Robotics)**

- This campaign sparked as the Robototes were losing $\frac{2}{3}$ of their shop space. The BA noticed a common trend with other teams and came together to help advocate for the FAIR bill to state legislators. This included meetings and presentations to state senators, state representatives, and school board members and writing many emails.
- The FAIR Bill aims to secure a designated shop space for each school, paid staff for every robotics team, and class credit for robotics.



Major Changes

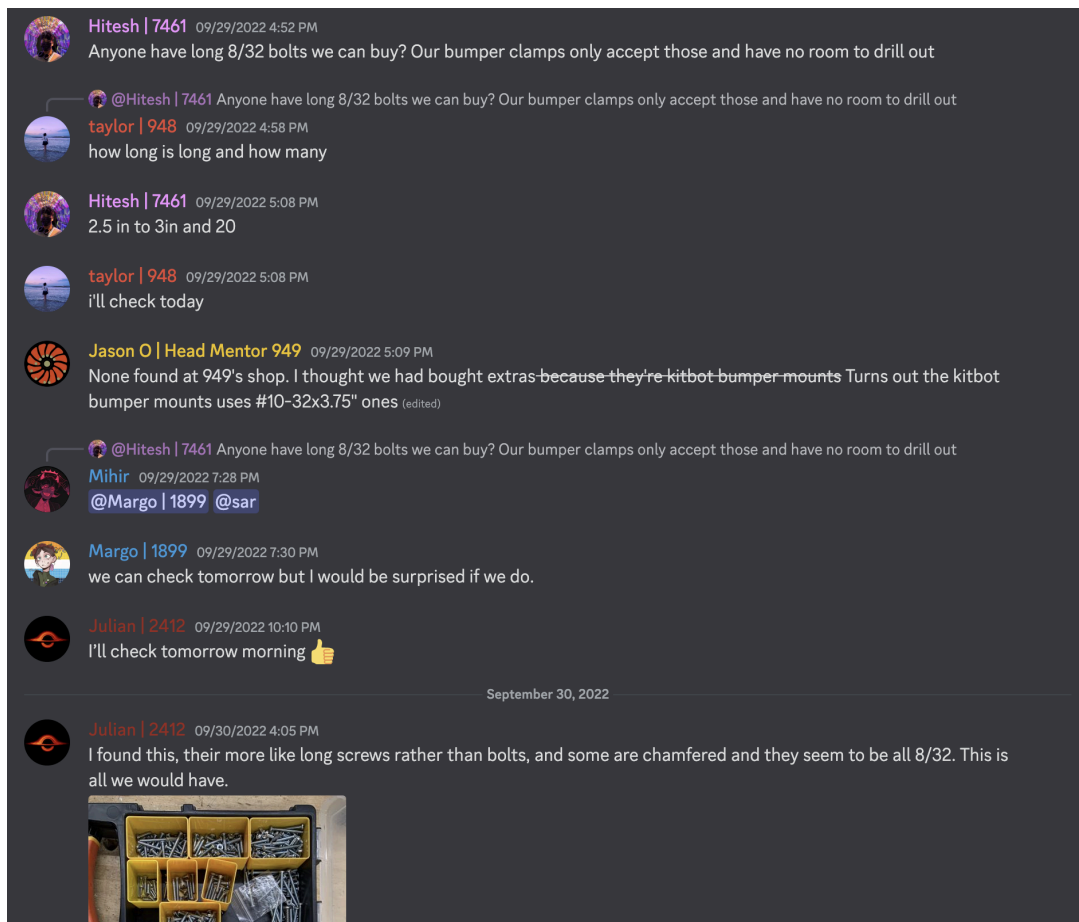
As members of the Bellevue Alliance Teams graduate and new ones join, the structure of the BA fluctuates. More recently, the BA has become more defined structurally to ensure accountability and reliability. As we worked closely with BA teams for the first time in many years for the FAIR Bill, it became clear that our current avenues of communication were inconsistent and insufficient. To improve this, we decided to implement the BA board to ensure that notes were being sent out and mentors were being kept in the loop.

SWOT

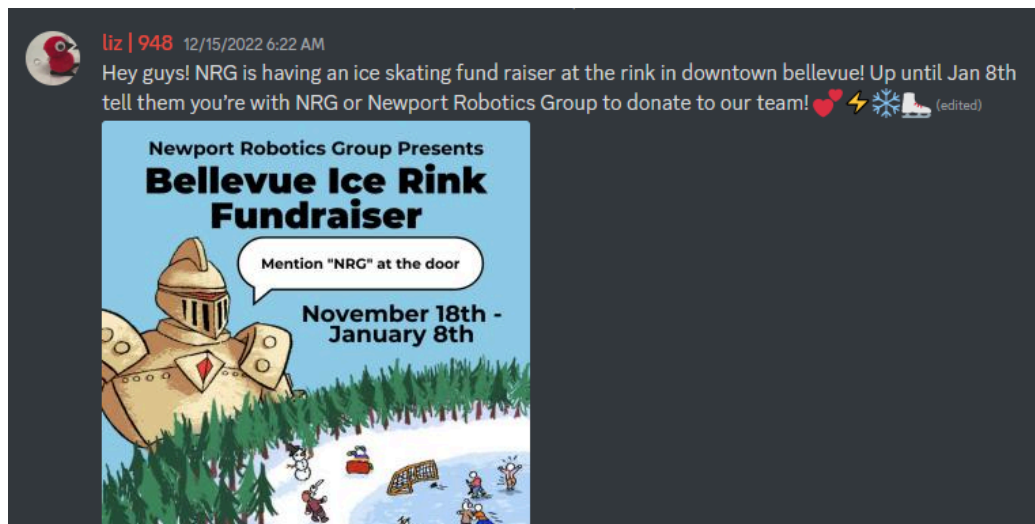
This is a SWOT analysis of the *current* structure of the Bellevue Alliance. It discusses the advantages and disadvantages of an alliance like the Bellevue Alliance. Please use this SWOT as a way to evaluate your own alliance, with suggestions as to answers for some of the boxes.

Strengths

- Increases access to external resources
 - Teams share mentors, shop spaces, practice fields, materials, training, and experiences.
 - Example: Asking for components is as easy as one message



- Greater leverage power
 - More people = more voices = more leverage. Public projects such as advocacy are made possible through the leverage power of multiple teams united.
 - Ex. Robototes is a team that works out of their school, Saints Robotics is a team that works out of an off campus facility. While both experiences are different, leverage allows us to ensure each team gets a shop space.
- Additional support at competition
 - Multiple other teams cheer for your team, especially in playoffs
Extra support in the pits – reliable resources if you forgot to pack something for competition
- Event / Volunteering / Fundraiser support
 - Alliances such as the BA provide teams with a more local and direct population and a more active avenue to advertise for any ongoing fundraiser and campaigns
 - Example: NRG hosted an ice skating fundraiser at the Bellevue downtown ice rink. Students from the BA and member teams helped attend to raise money.



- **Ongoing** – With the Robototes hosting FRC District Events, Titan Robotics hosting FTC events, and Saints Robotics hosting FLL Events, our BA member teams work on many projects that involve a lot of work. Together, members of the BA volunteer at these events, including setup/teardown and during event volunteering. This even extends to helping with outreaches and fundraisers for the other teams!



Weaknesses

- Lack of diversity in BA representatives at meetings in aspects of race, gender, and age
- Inconsistent communication between BA mentors and students
- Student involvement in the BA is concentrated to a small number of individuals from each member team
 - As a result, information is rarely disseminated from BA representatives to leadership or members of each constituent team.
 - Currently, a lot of the work is being done by the board and newer members aren't as involved.
- Training of newer BA members fails to clearly convey the goals and mission of the alliance
- BA activities post-covid made the cross-team utility of the BA a lot less valuable than before

Opportunities

- Strong Combined Mentor Network across the BA
 - Each team has a unique set of mentors with various strengths and sharing these mentors with other teams allows them to grow and learn from an expanded network of knowledgeable professionals
- Outlet to promote team events and activities
 - With 3/7 BA teams hosting multiple FIRST events from FLL, FTC, to FRC, the close interteam connections within the BA allows host teams to promote events and gain support from members of other BA teams

Threats

- Restrictive administrative policies on team workspaces and operations
 - Multiple BA teams have faced the threat of a loss in shop space and were only able to obtain their designated work spaces through utilizing their leverage as a part of this alliance
- Lack of communication Failure to communicate commitment levels
 - While the flexibility in commitment is an essential part of the Bellevue Alliance, an inability to clearly communicate a team's shifting priorities risks the function of the BA leading to disagreements within the organization and unproductive meetings

Starting Your Own Alliance

Defining your Goals

Before you create your own alliance, think about why you are creating an alliance. If you are creating an alliance for the sake of creating an alliance, your partner teams will lack purpose and motivation. How can you avoid this?

- a) Develop a list of what support you can provide for other teams + want to receive
- b) Develop a list of potential problems that creating an alliance might help solve
- c) Reach out to other teams in the area for interest in starting an alliance
- d) Find a shared vision/mission. Even if it is just to share resources, make sure that it is clear and unanimously agreed upon by all alliance members

Getting Started

1. Find at least 2-3 other FRC teams in your region looking to form an alliance
2. Identify common goals to develop a mission statement. Make sure all alliance members approve of the mission statement. (It is ok if the mission changes over the years)
3. Set expectations for the alliance. Questions to answer:
 - a. When/how will you meet?
 - b. What is the level of contribution and commitment to the alliance?
 - c. To what extent will the alliance affect team operations (should teams prioritize going to events from this alliance, etc.)
 - d. How can other teams be able to join this alliance? Will this be based on school district, geographic region, etc.?
4. Set up a communication platform that members (and mentors) in the alliance can access. Use preexisting software if possible (ex. if your school district uses Teams, you can set one up for this alliance because everyone already has access to it)
 - a. Discord Template: <https://discord.new/vd455DWKYNx5>
5. Develop a leadership/involvement structure. Ensure that every team gets an equal say if they want it.
 - a. Questions to answer:
 - i. Who will lead meetings?
 - ii. How will meeting agendas be set?
 - iii. How will the alliance sustain itself once the current leadership graduates?
 - iv. Who will be the main contact point for each team? (have 1-2 people you can go to for any questions)
 - b. Make sure that you hear everyone out before you come to a decision. If you have a conflict, here are some suggestions:
 - i. Majority vote, usually for smaller decisions
 - ii. Discuss with your team + mentors and come back to the issue. Then discuss findings and explain reasoning. Usually for extremely big decisions + projects
 - iii. Discuss and try to come up with a compromise
6. Get ready for your first meeting!

Key Activities

First Meeting

Mandatory Items:

- Make sure that all partner teams have a representative at the first meeting
- Establish and set up a form(s) of communication
- Each team should establish 1 - 2 students and 1 - 2 mentors as their main points of contact (document this information for later use)
- Create a mission statement and make sure that everyone agrees to it
- Create a meeting plan:
 - How often are you going to meet?
 - Where will the next meetings take place?
 - How will you determine future meeting times and venues?
- Define alliance membership expectations
- Begin the process of establishing leadership roles
- Ensure that each representative conveys decisions made to their teams, and enjoy your alliance!

Advice:

- All decisions should reach a consensus to avoid future conflict
- When defining mission statements and expectations, consider making them simple enough to adhere through rough patches but specific enough that each team knows what to expect from this alliance

Leadership Elections

Mandatory Items:

- Define what positions you want to have
 - Come up with expectations and responsibilities for each role
 - Who will write the agendas?
 - Who will take notes and send them out?
 - Who will manage social media if you choose to have one?
- Determine how many people you want to fill each position
- Determine the structure for the election process
 - Do you want each team to nominate someone for the board and then determine who gets what?
 - Do you want to do democratic elections?
 - When do elections happen?
 - Who in the individual team gets to determine which member joins the board for their team?
- Elect/nominate your board!
- Establish a reliably checked method of communication between every member of the board
- Delegate out responsibilities between members of the board

Advice:

- Allow for enough positions for all member teams to receive equal representation on the board
- Each team should select a board member that will adhere to their additional responsibilities consistently and reliably
- Each board member should know enough about their team to answer questions easily or know whom to ask
- Each team should have 1-2 alternative representatives with the role of attending meetings in the case the board member is unavailable. Note - these representatives should not be a part of the board. This may impact the distribution of representation
- Share the workload between member teams as appropriate to what they can commit to / are capable of doing at the time. Not everyone will be in the same position every year

For More Guidance

1. Reach out to bellevueroboticsalliance@gmail.com about starting your own alliance!
2. Join a meeting with us to discuss the initial steps and responsibilities for forming an alliance.
3. Launch your alliance and reach out to the BA if you need any help

Contact Us

- <https://www.thebellevuealliance.com/home>
- <https://www.instagram.com/bellevueroboticsalliance/>
- bellevueroboticsalliance@gmail.com