

What it Really Means to be Girl Powered

What does it really mean to be “Girl Powered?”

It has always been easy to superficially assume gender inclusion, but at Red River Robotics, we try to go deeper and find out what it takes to get girls *truly* involved. Instead of just trying to increase female membership, here our ultimate goal is to create **an environment where people feel comfortable enough to share their ideas and solutions, regardless of their gender.** And so, we define **#girlpowered** as a robotics program where girls are meaningfully contributing to their teams and being deeply involved in the decision-making process behind their robots.

Our Story:

Budding Efforts

Of course, our story starts out on an all-too-familiar note. When our VEX robotics program was first created just five years ago, we had a sad, but unsurprisingly low ratio of female involvement—only having one girl among ten other boys. With so few other girls involved and little active effort to include more, it wasn’t hard to see why our robotics program may have come off as intimidating to any potential girls who may have been initially interested.



In our second year, we tried implementing a **“girls” team** to inflate participation numbers. And, while it did help in attracting more female members to join over the years, it still didn’t address the root of the problem. There was still this pervasive idea of a “good” boys

team and an “amateur” girls team, and we quickly learned that putting all the new members on one team undermined the potential creativity and divergence of thought and replaced it with blind and rigid adherence to learning the basics. *We knew something had to change.*



“Girls team” in action

Taking Action

In the following years, we actively worked to address that problem. We spread out new girl members onto teams with experienced members and found that it led to overall higher-level development of new skills, while also making a conscious effort to attract new female members. This not only helped increase female membership in the club, but it also sparked **genuine interest and passion** within our girls, causing many to go out and genuinely spread the word to their friends as well.



It was during this wave of new female buzz and chatter that I’d actually joined the club myself. I had heard all about how fun of a club robotics was and became familiar with all the great accomplishments our program had achieved. Despite all this, I still had my fears when stepping into the clubroom for the first time. Incessant thoughts rattled through my head: *“Would I be the only girl? What if it’s awkward? Is it really okay for me to be here?”* However, my thoughts were immediately assuaged the moment I opened the door. I was greeted by a relieving number of other girls and familiar faces, and found no shortage of warm welcomes, even from the male members. *In that moment, I felt as if all my fears had melted away.*

Red River Robotics Now

Thanks to our ever-growing efforts towards gender inclusivity, our club now boasts the highest female participation ratio it's ever had and is making even larger strides in breaking the stereotypes and sexist roles far-too-commonly seen in the STEM field. We have now had **female-led teams qualify for VEX World Championships** solely on their own merits, and girls play a vital role in the engineering and decision-making processes on many of our top teams. In fact, even our current vice president and future president is now a girl once again! The innate merits of the **fresh and different perspective** girls bring is unquestionable at this point, and we only hope to help create a future where our girls feel comfortable to continue pursuing STEM and create innovative and divergent solutions for the world of tomorrow.



Angelica, current vice president and VEX 2020 World Championships qualifier. Go Angelica!

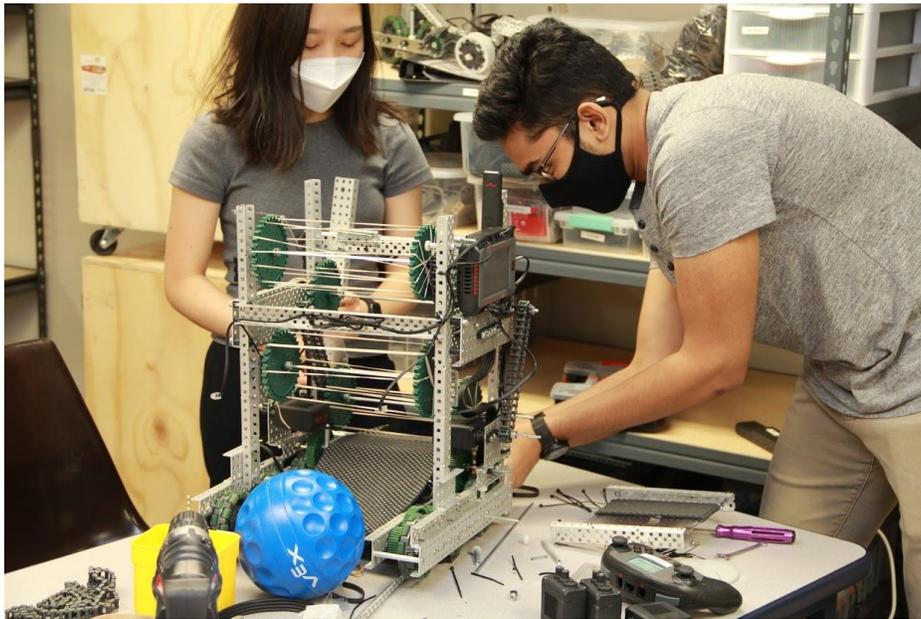


Our Role Model

But of course, all things considered, we thankfully still live in a world where women in STEM are steadily gaining more respect, which is why **Grace Hopper** is such an exceptionally empowering role model for all of us. Despite living in a time when women had just barely been given the right to vote, Hopper challenged and prevailed in the face of an incredibly sexist system and was able to achieve so much for the world of computer science. Her perseverance and grit despite the circumstances inspire us all to do better and push through our own problems through to the end.

Final Words

Our robotics program has come a long way. Now more than ever, we have girls **in executive positions, making decisions, and confidently taking charge**. By blurring the lines between society's predefined gender roles, we at Red River Robotics now only hope to continue making strides towards shattering stereotypes and helping create a better future, enriched by the wondrous and diverse perspectives of our most underrepresented.



Credits

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