

Girl Powered Essay

By Jonathan Mathew, Fitz Ramirez, Zahra Nadeem, Ashton Billings

ETC

1700 Spartan Dr, Elgin, IL 60123

We are the Engineering Tech Club (ETC) of Elgin Community College, and we have provided multiple avenues through which we have fostered a community that incorporates the GirlPowered initiative in our organization. We were founded in 2018 with the goal of promoting diversity and inclusivity in STEM, specifically in the field of robotics.

One avenue we used to achieve this initiative is recruitment. To attract a diverse group of members, our club reached out to underrepresented groups within the college and the surrounding community. We held informational meetings and workshops to introduce the basics of robotics and the opportunities available to the team. The team also formed partnerships with local organizations, such as the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers and the Society of Women Engineers to reach even more diverse students. Once members were recruited, we made sure to create a supportive and inclusive environment. Our club held regular team-building activities to foster camaraderie and teamwork and made sure to give every member a chance to take on leadership roles within the team. We also implemented a mentorship program where more experienced members would work with newer members to help them learn and grow. One specific example of a member who benefitted from the team's approach to diversity and inclusivity is Zahra. The following text is her testimony regarding her joining our club.

As a Muslim girl who's in STEM, a predominantly male field, I'm not used to having peers that look like me. Because of this, joining the robotics team at Elgin Community College (ECC) was a bit daunting for me at first, as I was worried that I wouldn't fit in with the other students. Luckily, the inclusivity of the team cleared all of these fears and doubts of mine. My team members were incredibly welcoming. Not only did they treat me as a fellow member of the club, but they were interested in learning more about my unique perspective as a Muslim girl. For example, Ozzy, a fellow member of the team, asked me about my religion of Islam, and my perspective on it as a Muslim woman. In general, the club is very diverse when it comes to gender, race, and religion. This leads to a lot of great conversations where the team discusses their different upbringings and cultures. Being a part of the robotics team also gave me the opportunity to explore my interests in many major STEM topics. No previous knowledge of topics was required, and many members were open to teaching me about anything I wanted to learn. Since joining the team, I've learned new skills such as 3D CAD modeling, programming, and the engineering process more elaborately. When I first joined, my team member, Julio, explained to me and the other new members all the parts we'd be using to build robots. He also explained the main concepts of robot building in general. Within just a few days, I was equipped with the skills to help the team progress and felt comfortable around the team. Overall, my experience being a part of the ECC robotics team is one of inclusivity, learning, and community. It's very rare to find a place where I can feel comfortable in my own skin, find friends that will last a lifetime, and learn skills that will push my education and career forward. I'm glad to say that I found all these things on this team, and I hope other women in STEM can find what I've found.

Our team's approach to diversity and inclusivity not only helped us to recruit a diverse group of members but also provided a supportive environment for all members to grow, learn,

and succeed. The team culture encourages everyone to try new things, reach outside their comfort zones, and embrace new experiences. The team's focus on mentorship and support helped members like Zahra to overcome their initial doubts and develop their skills and confidence, which ultimately led to her success. Furthermore, ETC made a point to showcase the achievements of their female and minority members, particularly at competitions and in presentations to recruit more underrepresented students into the field of robotics. We also regularly host workshops and events aimed at encouraging more underrepresented groups to explore STEM and robotics, providing resources and support to help them succeed.

In conclusion, our team's approach to diversity and inclusivity not only helped us to recruit a diverse group of members but also provide a supportive environment for all members to grow, learn, and succeed. ETC's story highlights the importance of creating an inclusive and diverse team that supports and encourages every member to reach their full potential, and that diversifying the robotics field is not only essential but also beneficial for everyone.