

ADMINISTRATIVE PANEL DECISION

International FIRST Committee Association v. FIRST Global Case No. D2026-3495

1. The Parties

The Complainant is International FIRST Committee Association, United States of America (“United States” or “U.S.”), represented by DEKA Research & Development Corporation, United States.

The Respondent is FIRST Global, United States.

2. The Domain Name and Registrar

The disputed domain name <first.global> is registered with GoDaddy.com, LLC (the “Registrar”).

3. Procedural History

The Complaint was filed with the WIPO Arbitration and Mediation Center (the “Center”) on August 6, 2026. On August 7, 2026, the Center transmitted by email to the Registrar a request for registrar verification in connection with the disputed domain name. On August 9, 2026, the Registrar transmitted by email to the Center its verification response disclosing registrant and contact information for the disputed domain name which differed from the named Respondent (REDACTED FOR PRIVACY / Registration Private, Domains By Proxy, LLC) and contact information in the Complaint. The Center sent an email communication to the Complainant on August 10, 2026, providing the registrant and contact information disclosed by the Registrar, and inviting the Complainant to submit an amendment to the Complaint. The Complainant filed an amended Complaint on August 11, 2026.

The Center verified that the Complaint together with the amended Complaint satisfied the formal requirements of the Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (the “Policy” or “UDRP”), the Rules for Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (the “Rules”), and the WIPO Supplemental Rules for Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (the “Supplemental Rules”).

In accordance with the Rules, paragraphs 2 and 4, the Center formally notified the Respondent of the Complaint, and the proceedings commenced on August 13, 2026. In accordance with the Rules, paragraph 5, the due date for Response was September 2, 2026. The Respondent did not submit any response. Accordingly, the Center notified the Respondent’s default on September 3, 2026.

The Center appointed David H. Bernstein as the sole panelist in this matter on September 7, 2026. The Panel finds that it was properly constituted. The Panel has submitted the Statement of Acceptance and Declaration of Impartiality and Independence, as required by the Center to ensure compliance with the Rules, paragraph 7.

On September 14, 2026, the Panel issued a Procedural Order pursuant to paragraphs 10 and 12 of the Rules, requesting that the Complainant submit a supplemental submission (1) providing documentation supporting the Complainant's assertion that it is an authorized licensee of the FIRST word-and-design mark (defined below) or evidence of asserted common law trademark rights in FIRST GLOBAL, (2) identifying the former employee the Complainant alleged had registered the disputed domain name, (3) providing evidence of communications with the former employee relating to the disputed domain name, (4) clarifying the Complainant's position on whether the former employee had authority to register the disputed domain name, and (5) explaining the nature and extent of the Complainant's current control over the website associated with the disputed domain name. The Panel requested that this material be submitted by September 25, 2026, and reset the date for expected decision to October 9, 2026. The Complainant submitted a supplemental submission on September 16, 2026. The Respondent remained in default.

4. Factual Background

The Complainant is a corporation that conducts international STEM educational programs and robotics competitions, doing business as FIRST Global. The Complainant asserts that it is an authorized licensee of the FIRST word-and-design mark for educational services (U.S. Trademark Registration No. 2,436,090 registered on March 20, 2001) owned by For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST). The Complainant also asserts that it has common law rights in the FIRST GLOBAL mark.

The Panel has determined that For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST) also owns registrations for the word marks FIRST (Reg. No. 3,631,146) and FIRSTINSPIRES (Reg. No. 6,225,935), also for educational services.¹

The disputed domain name was registered on December 29, 2016 by a then-employee of the Complainant working on the FIRST Global initiative. In 2021, the Complainant reimbursed that employee for the cost of renewing the disputed domain name.

Registrar verification of the disputed domain name identifies the registrant as "FIRST Global," with an address associated with the Complainant's former office, and an email address ("[,,,]@gmail.com") that the Complainant states is not associated with the Complainant and over which it has no control. The Complainant does not have access to the Registrar account or registration email, and does not know who, if anyone, currently has access to the registrar account or registration email. However, the Complainant maintains access to the website associated with the disputed domain name and is able to edit the content of that website, which the Complainant actively uses to host its organizational content.

The employee who registered the disputed domain name and administered the renewal of the domain name is now deceased. The Complainant states that the former employee likely had implied authority to register the disputed domain name for the Complainant, but the Complainant is unable to establish the precise instructions given at the time. The Complainant has also been unable to obtain any past correspondence, instructions, payment records, or notes of calls or meetings with the former employee regarding the initial registration of the disputed domain name, the 2021 renewal, or any requests to the former employee to transfer control of the disputed domain name to the Complainant or update the email address associated with the disputed domain name.

¹Noting in particular the general powers of a panel articulated inter alia in paragraphs 10 and 12 of the UDRP Rules, it has been accepted that a panel may undertake limited factual research into matters of public record if it would consider such information useful to assessing the case merits and reaching a decision, in particular to affirm or corroborate a party's contention.

In February 2026, the former employee's estate executed two assignments that assigned the former employee's right, title, and interest in the disputed domain name and associated website to the Complainant. However, the Complainant states these assignments did not provide access to the registration email or registrar account, and "those access problems remain unresolved." The Complainant has not provided any details on the extent to which, if any, it has tried to effectuate these assignments with the Registrar or otherwise has attempted to obtain an assignment of the email address associated with the disputed domain name.

The registration for the disputed domain name is scheduled to expire on December 29, 2026. The Complainant has not indicated whether it has attempted to use a drop-catching or backorder service so that it will be able to register the disputed domain name once the current registration expires.

5. Parties' Contentions

A. Complainant

The Complainant contends that it has satisfied each of the elements required under the Policy for a transfer of the disputed domain name.

First, the Complainant contends that the disputed domain name is confusingly similar to a trademark in which the Complainant has rights. The Complainant contends that it has rights in the FIRST word-and-design mark owned by For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST) as an authorized licensee. In support, the Complainant submitted an unexecuted license agreement with For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST). The Complainant also contends that it has acquired common law rights in the mark FIRST GLOBAL. In support, the Complainant submitted exhibits demonstrating use of FIRST GLOBAL in connection with its services beginning in 2017. The Complainant states that the disputed domain name is confusingly similar to the FIRST word-and-design mark because it encompasses the entirety of the mark, and that the disputed domain name is identical to the FIRST GLOBAL mark when considered in its entirety.

Second, the Complainant contends that the Respondent has no rights or legitimate interests in the disputed domain name. The Complainant states that the Respondent was not authorized to own or retain the disputed domain name independently of the Complainant. The Complainant argues that, even if the former employee had implied authority to register the disputed domain name on the Complainant's behalf, this did not grant the former employee, or anyone else, the authority to acquire an independent personal interest in the disputed domain name.

Third, the Complainant contends that the disputed domain name was registered and is being used by the Respondent in bad faith. The Complainant argues that bad faith has been established by the circumstances of the registration and retention of the disputed domain name: the Complainant did not authorize anyone, including the former employee, to obtain ownership of the disputed domain name, yet the disputed domain name was never transferred to the Complainant. The Complainant also argues that a finding of bad faith is supported by the fact that the former employee worked on the FIRST Global initiative for the Complainant and necessarily knew of the Complainant and its mark, and thus specifically targeted the mark with the registration.

B. Respondent

The Respondent did not reply to the Complainant's contentions.

6. Discussion and Findings

Paragraph 4(a) of the Policy provides that the Complainant must demonstrate the following elements to obtain an order that a disputed domain name be transferred:

- (i) the disputed domain name is identical or confusingly similar to a trademark or service mark in which the Complainant has rights;
- (ii) the Respondent has no rights or legitimate interest in respect of the disputed domain name; and
- (iii) the disputed domain name has been registered and is being used in bad faith.

The Complainant bears the burden of proof of each element. For the reasons stated below, the Panel finds that the Complainant has not proven all three elements by a preponderance of evidence.

A. Identical or Confusingly Similar

It is well accepted that the first element functions primarily as a standing requirement. [WIPO Overview 3.1](#), section 1.7.

The Complainant asserts that it has rights in the FIRST word-and-design mark as an authorized licensee of the owner of the trademark registration. At the same time, it claims to be the owner of common law rights in the FIRST GLOBAL trademark.

Because of the contradictory nature of these assertions, and the fact that the FIRST trademark is federally registered to a party that is not a party in this proceeding, the Panel asked the Complainant for clarification. The Panel specifically noted that the Complainant might, for example, submit “a copy of the license agreement or a statement from the licensor regarding the license to the Complainant and the Complainant’s authorization to seek transfer of the disputed domain name to the Complainant.” In reply to the Procedural Order, the Complainant only muddled the water. It continued to assert both that it was a licensee and an owner of common law rights. In support, it submitted only an unexecuted draft of a license agreement, while also submitting evidence of its use of the FIRST GLOBAL trademark on its website, in press releases, and in media reports. It did not submit any statement from the owner of the trademark registration confirming that the Complainant has rights in the FIRST mark or authorization to file a UDRP complaint on the trademark owner’s behalf. See [WIPO Overview 3.1](#), section 1.4.1.

The problem with this evidence is that an unexecuted license agreement does not prove that the Complainant is an authorized licensee. And the evidence of use of the mark that the Complainant submitted shows use of the mark, but it does not show that the *Complainant* owns the mark or that this use inures to the *Complainant’s* benefit. To the contrary, the website pages that the Complainant submitted state that “FIRST® [and] the FIRST logo® [,,] are registered trademarks of For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST®).”

The Panel does not seek to be overly formalistic. The Complainant has averred that it is a licensee of the mark, and its Complaint has been certified. That assertion is entitled to some deference. But, that assertion is somewhat undermined by the evidence that the Complainant itself submitted, and the Panel must take all of the evidence into account in making findings of fact. Ultimately, this is a legal proceeding, and parties are expected to submit competent evidence substantiating their claims (especially after being given a second chance to do so in response to a Procedural Order). The fact that the Complainant has failed to provide a clear indication of its standing to bring this action is troubling. The Panel is proceeding cautiously because, in the absence of clear evidence, and given the contradictory evidence that the Complainant submitted and the fact that the relevant trademark is registered to a third party, there is a risk that the Panel might order transfer and might inadvertently end up transferring the disputed domain name to a party that is not entitled to own the disputed domain name. Cf. [WIPO Overview 3.1](#), section 4.13.

If the Panel were forced to rule, it likely would have found, on this record, that the Complainant has failed to satisfy the first element and has failed to show that it has standing. If this factor were determinative, the Panel might have considered whether to give the Complainant a third bite at this apple, and try again to submit competent evidence. Ultimately, in light of the Panel's finding with respect to the third element, the Panel need not decide the first element of the Policy.

B. Rights or Legitimate Interests

Because it is unclear who the Respondent is, it is unclear whether the Respondent has rights or legitimate interests in the disputed domain name. If, as the Complainant avers, the Respondent is a deceased former employee of the Complainant (which would certainly explain the Respondent's default), it is hard to imagine how the Respondent could have any rights or legitimate interests in the disputed domain name. On the other hand, the named registrant of the disputed domain name is FIRST Global, the dba name for the Complainant itself, and the physical address listed in the registration record is the Complainant's own former address. If that is the case, the disputed domain name would in fact be owned by the Complainant (even if the Complainant has no access to the email address associated with the disputed domain name), in which case the Respondent is essentially the alter ego of the Complainant and would clearly have rights or legitimate interests in the disputed domain name. Given this uncertainty and the Panel's finding in relation to the third element, the Panel need not decide the second element of the Policy.

C. Registered and Used in Bad Faith

The Complainant has failed to establish that the disputed domain name was registered and is being used in bad faith.

As with its allegations with respect to the first element, the Complainant's allegations regarding registration of the disputed domain name are inconsistent. On the one hand, the Complainant states that it did not authorize the former employee who registered the disputed domain name to obtain personal ownership of the disputed domain name. But, when asked in the Procedural Order to explain the instructions given to the deceased employee, the Complainant admitted that it "likely" gave the former employee authority to register the disputed domain name on its behalf. Moreover, the employee appears to have registered the disputed domain name in the Complainant's name, and with the Complainant's then-street address. The Complainant has not explained whether the email address that the employee used may have been the Complainant's email address in 2016 when the disputed domain name was first registered.

The fact that the Complainant appears to have lost (or was unable to secure) access to the email address used to register the disputed domain name is not a problem that the UDRP was designed to address. The UDRP is a narrow mechanism designed to address abusive domain name registrations, also known as cybersquatting. That is not what appears to have occurred here.

Applying the UDRP strictly, the first question is whether the disputed domain name was registered in bad faith. If the employee was authorized to register the disputed domain name, and she in fact registered in the name of the Complainant, using the Complainant's then-street address, the registration cannot have been in bad faith, even if the employee used an email address for the registration to which the Complainant does not have access, unless the employee used this email address maliciously and surreptitiously to hijack the disputed domain name and divert control of the domain name from the employer. There is no evidence of any such malicious conduct here.

The Complainant also fails to show that the disputed domain name is being used in bad faith. The Complainant maintains control over the website associated with the disputed domain name and has used the website for its own purposes for years. The Complainant has not provided any evidence demonstrating that the disputed domain name is being used in bad faith. The mere fact that the Complainant has failed to secure access to the email account that was used by the former employee when the disputed domain name was registered or renewed is not evidence of bad faith use of the disputed domain name.

Furthermore, even if the former employee, who has since passed away, did personally own the registration or control the email address associated with the registration, the Complainant has submitted documentary evidence indicating that any rights that the former employee had in the disputed domain name have already been assigned to the Complainant. If those documents are valid, the Complainant should be able to go to court to effectuate the assignments and obtain control of the disputed domain name, or, one would think, may be able to obtain relief from the Registrar directly. The former might be a more expensive or difficult process than filing a UDRP complaint, but the UDRP is not meant to be a procedure to solve all domain name ownership problems. *The Thread.com, LLC v. Jeffrey S. Poploff*, WIPO Case No. [D2000-1470](#) (the UDRP is “not a general domain name court”).

For all the foregoing reasons, the Panel finds that the Complainant has failed to satisfy the third element of the Policy.

7. Decision

For the foregoing reasons, the Complaint is denied.

/David H. Bernstein/

David H. Bernstein

Sole Panelist

Date: October 5, 2026