

# AIRPORT OPEN HOUSE

The Complete Guide to Holding an Airport Open House



A Publication of the AOPA Airport Support Network  
[www.aopa.org/asn](http://www.aopa.org/asn)





## Planning Timeline – *Start Early!*



This section highlights some of the more specific items you may consider in beginning to plan your event. Please see the detailed checklist contained at the end of this publication.

- Pick the date/times and organize committee
- Obtain Approval of airport sponsor
- Check Insurance requirements

**12 months**

- Plan general outline of days activity
- Plan financial needs & budget and identify co-sponsors
- Identify static display aircraft

**11 months**

- Contact other civic groups for participation
- Begin fund raising events
- Spread the word to local airport tenants/businesses

**10 months**

- Divide tasks to specific committee members
- Create public relations package to promote
- FAA tower coordination?

**9 months**

- Security needs defined
- Determine concession needs
- Coordination with local fire officials

**8 months**

- Define areas on the airport
- Identify vendors/exhibitors
- Identify press/media sources for promotion

**7 months**

- Obtain Volunteers for event day
- Arrange port-a-johns, water needs, rest areas, etc.

**6 months**

NOTE: Planning and above continue until all tasks completed.

**Promote, Promote, Promote!** **1 month**

- Notify media, circulate prepared press releases
- Final planning meeting with all participants
- Early arrival of volunteers
- Last minute briefing

**1 day!**

America's airports face more challenges than even before. For every airport that is directly threatened, countless others are under scrutiny—from developers wishing to build on the airport; from airport neighbors complaining about overflights or noise; or even from airport sponsors struggling to understand the facility's value to the community.

While general aviation pilots appreciate the local airport and look forward to going there, the nonflying public lacks awareness of and frequently is apathetic toward that airport.

That's not universally true, of course, but it certainly describes the situation in hundreds, if not thousands, of communities across the country. At best the community may be vaguely aware that there is a "little" airport located somewhere outside of town that caters to those "Piper Cubs" occasionally seen buzzing about. Ask them if they've ever been to the airport, and most will shake their heads no. They probably couldn't even give directions on how to drive there.

Why is that? Why is it that many general aviation airports are ignored, perhaps even shunned as irrelevant and dangerous, by much of the public? Are we, as pilots and aircraft owners, to blame for keeping the public in the dark about the benefits of a community airport, or are people simply prejudiced against small aircraft and general aviation airports?

## Lack of Contact

A big part of the problem with general aviation's poor visibility and, ultimately, lack of acceptance in the community is the fact that relatively few people have *direct contact* with a general aviation airport, especially when compared with an airline airport. Most people living in or near a city with scheduled airline service can tell you where that airport is located. That's because many have been there at least once to travel someplace, or to drop off or pick up someone else who is traveling.

An airport that serves general aviation exclusively may have more activity, measured in takeoffs and landings, than an airline airport. But because most of the public does not travel in general aviation aircraft, they have no specific reason to go to the airport. It is most likely situated well out of town and, except for a sign, may not even be visible from the road. Because they are relatively small and quiet, general aviation aircraft may come and go at the local airport with few in the community even being aware of the activity.

Even if people are aware of the local general aviation airport, they probably don't feel as if they are welcome to just drop in for a visit. In fact, many airports give the same stay-away impression as a sealed-off military base. Everything is fenced, there are numerous signs bearing ominous warnings such as "No

Trespassing! Authorized Personnel Only!" and you may have to punch in some sort of secret code to get through a security gate blocking access to the airfield.

## Facilitating Exposure

General aviation, and many general aviation airports, are neither very visible nor very hospitable to the nonflying public. The unfortunate exception to this lack of visibility is if an accident occurs. No matter if the accident takes place locally, regionally, or even nationally, the media will jump on the story. The ensuring coverage simply reinforces any latent fears the public may harbor about the safety and wisdom of flying in small aircraft.

The problem, then, is exposure. On the one hand, lack of *physical* exposure to the public is an impediment to better understanding of general aviation and the many ways in which it benefits the larger community. On the other hand, when there is exposure having to do with an *awareness* of general aviation, chances are it will be negative in perception—like the exposure that follows an accident.

The question that general aviation pilots and aircraft owners should ask is, How can we get better exposure, both physical exposure and awareness, of our airport and of general aviation? How can we showcase general aviation and demonstrate how it benefits the community?

They are critical questions. In the absence of knowledge and communication, people assume the worst. For example, if someone new to this country based his opinion of the public school system only on what he saw on the evening news, he would perceive it as out of control and suffering from pervasive lawlessness at the hands of roving, maniacal, gun-toting adolescents. If the same person paid a visit to their local elementary, middle, or high school, however, they would likely find a learning, loving, and protective environment for our children. We've all heard about violent acts committed by young students, but they are rare events. Even so, it's easy for our emotions, and therefore our opinions, to be influenced by what is reported rather than what actually exists at our local schools.



It's much the same with general aviation. If all that people know about general aviation is the generally negative news they see on television, hear on the radio, and read in newspapers and general-interest magazines, they can't help but form a one-dimensional image and end up with a negatively biased opinion.

## Give Them a Reason

The good news is that we pilots can be effective in our local communities at building an understanding of and support for general aviation. How we do that gets back to the question posed earlier: How can we get better exposure, both physical exposure and awareness, of our airport and of general aviation?

By inviting the public out to the airport to have a look around, that's how. When you're curious about something, nothing beats having a look for yourself. That's the simple goal of having an open house at your airport—to give the public an opportunity to look for themselves, to see and enjoy the fascinating variety inherent in general aviation, and to learn about the good deeds performed, the business conducted, and the public safety functions made possible.

All it takes for someone with the slightest bit of interest or curiosity to come out to the airport is a reason and an invitation. Invite them to come take an up-close-and-personal look at a single-engine family aircraft, an experimental design someone has built in their garage, an emergency medical service helicopter, a workaday charter twin, or a proud old warbird.

Offer them a chance to take an inexpensive ride in an airplane or helicopter. Show them an airport control tower, a pilot's flight-planning area, and an aircraft maintenance shop. Give them demonstrations of the expertise and equipment of local fire and rescue squads, educate them with informational and product exhibits, and entertain them with music, clowns, and activities. In short, hold an open house at your airport, and invite the public in.

Your airport's not threatened, and it already enjoys a good relationship with the local community? Great! But you should still think about holding a public event at your airport. One aggressive developer can quickly change that situation—that's already happened too many times. Besides, a GA airport can never have too much community support.

## Opening Eyes

An open house is an excellent way to begin to build a good relationship with the community served by the airport. It's an opportunity to present a more complete picture of what really goes on at the airport than people see just driving by. How many people in the communi-

ty are aware of the businesses that operate at the airport, providing jobs and contributing to the local economy? How many know the strategic role the airport plays in serving the region's transportation needs? How many know of the airport's critical role in supporting public safety? An open house with static displays, exhibits, tours, presentations, and the like can go a long way in opening the community's eyes to the airport's true purpose and value.

Of course, an open house also is an excellent way to prospect for new converts to aviation. Whether it's a local business owner who is made aware of the concept and availability of chartering aircraft, a high school student who is awakened to the excellent opportunities awaiting in the aircraft maintenance field, or a young professional who is inspired to act on her longstanding interest in learning to fly, you never know who will respond—or how—to the opportunities on display at an airport open house.

At its core, however, an open house should not be an exercise in preaching to the choir. Yes, everyone in aviation is properly interested in bringing new people into the fold. That should be one of the stated objectives of holding an open house. But the primary goal ought to be opening the gates to a curious public. Show them what's behind those gates and fences, and you'll go a long way toward bridging a gulf of understanding and building a positive, productive relationship with the community.

You'll be in good company. Successful airport open houses are held across the country each year. From Albert Whitted Field in St. Petersburg, Florida, to Baraboo Wisconsin Dells in Baraboo, Wisconsin; from Morgantown Municipal Airport in West Virginia to Aurora State Airport in Aurora, Oregon—even at Kona International at Keahole Airport in Kailua, Hawaii—open houses have increased public awareness of the airport.

### Tip:

Make it a point to issue special open-house invitations to people and organizations that have been critical of the airport for some reason. Let them know they will be official VIPs and will receive guided tours, special seating, and other personal attention. They may not come, but they may very well send members of their family in their place. The gesture will be remembered.



## Begin Early

So you've decided to hold an open house at your airport, or you're at least thinking about the possibility. Great! Deciding to have one is the easy part. Now it has to be organized and staged, and that's when it begins to get tough. Don't fool yourself into thinking an airport open house can be planned over a few informal meetings starting a couple weeks before the scheduled event. It can't.

If there is one piece of advice that comes through loud and clear from anyone who has ever been involved in planning an airport open house, it is this: **Start planning early.** A year in advance of the planned event is not too soon.

Why such a drawn-out planning process? For one, you've got to come up with a reliable group of hard-working assistants, either volunteers or, if circumstances permit, paid professional staff. For another, there are several fundamental decisions that must be made about the nature of the event. Potential exhibitors and owners of display aircraft must be identified, contacted, and signed up.

It may be necessary to apply for and receive various local and FAA permits and approvals. And there are countless details to identify, supplies to obtain, and tasks to assign before the first eager visitor arrives on open-house day.

Organizing an airport open house, even a modest effort with no fly-bys or airshow, is a Herculean task, especially if it's being done for the first time. Experience is of immeasurable help, but if you've never been involved in such an endeavor, how do you even know where to begin?



## First Things First

The decision to hold an airport open house is just the first of many important decisions to be made. What kind of open house do you envision? Who will sponsor it? Who will organize it? How much will it cost? Following are some of the basic decisions that must be made very early in the game in order for detailed, specific planning to begin.

**Establish an objective.** What do you and your group hope to accomplish by having an airport open house? Is your objective to promote the use and value of the airport to the community by attracting the gen-

eral public to the airport? Is it to put a positive face on an airport that has suffered from negative publicity? How about to prospect for potential flight training customers, aircraft buyers, etc? Each of these objectives is excellent, but by making one of them the primary goal, you establish a clear mission that will guide your planning efforts.

For example, Van Nuys Airport, north of Los Angeles, California, conducts an annual Aviation Expo with the objective of giving something back to the community most affected by airport operations. It's the busiest general aviation airport in the world, and it's situated in the center of a residential community. Van Nuys Expo organizers seek to foster goodwill for the airport within that community.

Residents pay no admission fee to see Expo, a two-day event featuring a major airshow, static displays, and exhibits, among other attractions. Corporate sponsors and municipal funding cover the cost of staging the event. Meanwhile, Expo planners donate a portion of concession proceeds to 20 area nonprofit agencies that provide volunteers to help staff the event. During the 1990s, the Van Nuys Expo generated more than a quarter-million dollars for area youth and service organizations.

Reid-Hillview Airport in metropolitan San Jose, California, has been under attack for years by hostile local elected officials intent on closing the important general aviation reliever airport. One way airport supporters counter that offensive is by building local residential support for the airport. In fact, Reid-Hillview's annual Aviation Day open house carries the theme "Your Airport, Your Community." Cultural exhibits and demonstrations highlighting the largely ethnic communities surrounding the airport are a big part of the day's festivities.

The annual fall Plant City Strawberry Air Fest, east of Tampa, Florida, does double duty as a community-sponsored family fun day out at the airport, and also as an introduction to aviation for nonpilots, especially youth. Some 400 to 500 kids get to take a Young Eagles first flight during the Air Fest, courtesy of two area Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) chapters.

Articulate a mission or objective for your open house, and base your planning on that.

**Airshow or no?** Two things are certain if you hold an airshow in conjunction with an airport open house. First, you'll attract a much bigger crowd with an afternoon of precision aerobatics and high-performance aircraft demonstrations than if your open house has no airshow component. Second, the complexity of planning an open house, and the cost of staging it, rise exponentially if it includes an airshow.



If you think your event should include an airshow, see “So You’re Considering an Airshow?” on page 13.

Aside from safety, economics, and planning considerations, there is a philosophical issue for airport open-house planners and sponsors to consider in deciding whether or not to have an airshow: Will an airshow contribute to achieving the objectives set by organizers? If the primary objective of the open house is to raise funds for a cause or organization, a well-managed airshow can certainly go a long way toward achieving that goal because of the crowds it will generate. If the primary objective of having an open house is to educate the community about the transportation, economic, public safety, and lifestyle benefits of having a vibrant local general aviation airport, however, then it can be argued that an airshow may actually be a distraction.

The noise, commotion, and crowds associated with an airshow can make it difficult to present and manage the kind of demonstrations, exhibits, and static displays that focus on general aviation activities and community organizations and services. On the other hand, the absence of an airshow means lower attendance numbers at an open house. Some organizers believe, however, that it’s a more productive attendance because people have a better opportunity to learn about and enjoy the airport itself.

A middle ground exists between staging a full-blown aerobatic airshow and having only static displays. Many airports organize aircraft fly-bys in lieu of aerobatic demonstrations. For example, the annual Scottsdale, Arizona, Air Fair features a full day of non-aerobatic fly-bys ranging from high-speed passes by a P-51 Mustang and slower (but no less exciting) tours of the pattern by a restored B-17, to a U.S. Air Force B-2 bomber fly-over. No FAA waivers are required because the aircraft are not executing aerobatic maneuvers.

The constant flying at Scottsdale calls for close coordination with the air traffic control tower, and cooperation from airport FBOs catering to business aircraft operators who may be inconvenienced. The payoff is in attendance. Some 25,000 people typically come to the airport to enjoy the two-day AirFair. Organizers are convinced the fly-bys are a big reason people come to the event.

Another option may be a parachute jump. A parachute jump may not require an FAA waiver if the landing zone is in the middle of the airport, away from people. FSDO managers can provide guidance on this question.

Bottom line: Lots of factors go into the air-show-or-no decision, and you owe it to planners, sponsors, and the community to research all of the factors that apply in your specific situation.

**Date?** What time of year should you hold your airport open house? Summer is an obvious choice because of warm ambient temperatures and the likelihood of good weather. Also, kids are out of school and families

seek weekend outdoor activities. However, consider that your open house will compete for attention with many other area summer weekend activities, many of which offer better food, music, people-watching, and participatory activities than an airport open house.

Before committing to a date, check with the local chamber of commerce, parks and recreation department, and other entities to see whether any community events are already scheduled for your proposed date. If there is another event planned, can you use it to raise interest and leverage attendance at your open house? If you cannot, consider an alternate date.

During the summer airshow and fly-in season, you may find that it’s more difficult to line up performers and static display aircraft. With the burgeoning number of airshows and fly-ins around the country, availability of performers, static display aircraft, and exhibitors is an issue. Set a date for an open house as soon as possible, get commitments from aircraft participants, and then publicize the event so that yours is not overshadowed by a competing event.

Finally, summer is vacation time for most families with school-age children. If your airport is in a region that families take vacation from rather than at, you might want to consider some other season in which to hold an airport open house.

In more southerly climates, the fall and spring off-seasons are opportune times to have an airport open house. The weather is more tolerable than if the event were held on a sweltering summer weekend, and the seasonal tourist and winter residents have not yet arrived. Also, the open house will compete with fewer area events.

### **Who should sponsor the open house, and who will help plan and organize it?**

The answers to these questions depend entirely on the circumstances. In many cases, the governing airport authority is the primary sponsor and organizer. For example, at airports such as Van Nuys that have a relatively large professional staff, the open house is planned and organized by the staff. Volunteers are eagerly sought, but the overall management is in the hands of paid, professional airport staff members. Typically, a member of the staff functions as the hands-on chairper-

**Tip:** In lieu of rescheduling in the event of bad weather—a dubious proposition given the difficulty of lining up exhibitors, vendors, static display participants, and performers—rain insurance is available to cover lost gate receipts or other income.



son, even though the formal title may be bestowed on a dignitary for political reasons.

At smaller airports, the open house may be sponsored, planned, and organized by a user group, pilot organization, or FBO.

A successful open house at Page Field in Ft. Myers means a healthy EAA chapter budget for the coming year because the chapter sponsors the open house—and reaps all the proceeds. At Merrill C. Meigs Field on Lake Michigan at the foot of downtown Chicago, the annual open house is conducted by the nonprofit

Friends of Meigs Field as a way to attract positive public attention to the airport and its supporters. The organization was founded in the heat of the city's efforts to close the airport in favor of building a lakeshore park. A similar motivation is behind the Reid-Hillview Airport Association's organization of that airport's annual open house.

If the primary organizer of the open house is an airport user group, club, or organization, it should seek cosponsorship from the airport authority, owner, or other entity that sponsors the airport. Having that official seal of approval will pave the way for cooperation from airport staff, and possible in-kind assistance in the form of manpower supplies and equipment, and perhaps even funding. Most airport managers and owners are advocates for the airport, and helping to sponsor and organize an open house for the community

is an excellent way to show their support. Even if the airport has a small—or no—staff, the support of its operator will be critical.

Regardless of who is the primary sponsor, it's imperative that all interested parties participate in the planning from the beginning. This includes the airport manager, the air traffic control tower manager (if applicable), a representative from the municipality or county, and FBOs, among others. Solicit airport businesses, flight schools, user groups, EAA chapters, and other interested parties also should be invited and encouraged to participate in planning the open house.

**One day or two?** The EAA chapter that cosponsors and organizes the annual fall Aviation Days at Page Field in Ft. Myers, Florida, says that on the first day of the two-day airport open house, the chapter earns back the cost of staging the event. On the second day, it makes its profit, which goes toward supporting



chapter activities. Consideration should be given to contributing a portion of your profits to local community charities—doing so will provide added positive public relations to the event and the airport community.

Once you've arranged for all of the people, equipment, services, and permits and approvals necessary to have a one-day open house, it's a relatively small commitment to extend the event to two days. In addition to the kind of economic benefit enjoyed by the folks at Page Field, there is one other compelling reason to have a two-day open house. Good broadcast and print media coverage of the first day of the open house will spur attendance on the second day. It gives people an opportunity to go to two different events during the weekend instead of having to choose between the airport and a boat show or community picnic, for example.

The major problem associated with a weekend-long open house is securing solid commitments from volunteer workers and static display and fly-by participants to come back on Day Two. There's a cost involved because of equipment rental fees. Also, organizers typically provide room, meals, and ground transportation to display pilots and performers, if applicable. The bigger problem, however, is the time commitment for those involved.

As with most open-house planning variables, the decision to go just one day or two depends on your particular circumstances. Just be sure to weigh all the factors.

**Tip:** One way to virtually guarantee problems is to spring surprises on people with authority, such as the airport manager or air traffic control tower manager. At one open house, organizers had not discussed having fly-bys with the tower. When the tower chief learned at the last minute that a fly-by involving several high-performance aircraft was being planned, he reacted by prohibiting the crowd-pleasing fly-by—even though no aerobatic maneuvers would be involved. Minimize the potential for problems by planning thoroughly for every possible contingency and involving every possible interest in the planning.

## Initial Organization

Once it's been decided what kind of open house to have, what the objectives are, when to have it, and who will sponsor and organize it, it's time to begin the detailed planning process.

Establish a list of committees based upon essential tasks and responsibilities.

Appoint a head of each committee, and identify potential members. Set clear goals for each committee and each committee leader.

Involve organizations such as the Civil Air Patrol.

Members and cadets are great at directing vehicular traffic, helping to manage the crowds, and providing security on the ramp.



## Major Committee Responsibilities

What are the major tasks to focus on when planning an open house? Should you worry more about how many portable toilets to rent than the number of ads to appear in the open-house program? Following is a suggested list of major responsibilities that could be used to determine committee assignments.

- **Permitting and approvals from:**
  - FAA (notams, waiver of airspace for airshow)
  - Airport authority
  - City or town
- **Exhibitors and vendors** (including food permits)
- **Supplies and equipment**
- **Signage**
- **Corporate sponsors**
- **Static display**
- **Fly-in aircraft** (parking and transport of people to and from display area)
- **Flight ops** (rides, fly-bys)
- **Daily program**
- **Event publication** (format, editorial, advertising, printing, distribution)
- **Promotion**
- **Insurance**
- **Car parking** (buses to and from open house if parking is remote)
- **Incidentals** (water, sunscreen, shaded seating area for resting)
- **Cleanup**

**Tip:** When selecting top managers and committee heads, strive for continuity. People who have had experience with a previous open house can help fast-forward the planning process.

**Tip:** Put commitments and agreements in writing and distribute to all involved so there is no misplaced blame, backing out, or dispute if a disagreement arises later on.

**Tip:** Schedule a final briefing with staff the day before the open house begins, not the morning of the event. There will be too much going on.

**Tip:** Identify a core group of people who can make decisions on their feet, and appoint them as the Troubleshooting Team. Give each a visible uniform such as a brightly colored shirt with logo, and deploy them around the open-house area during the event. They are the people whom open-house workers should seek out for help in quickly solving the inevitable on-site problems. Equip each troubleshooter with a cellular telephone. Walkie-talkies operate on a common frequency, which can become congested.

## Budget

How much will it cost to hold an airport open house, and what are the income sources? The answers to these two basic budget questions are as varied as the events themselves. Harriet Alexander Field in Salida, Colorado, held a one-day airport open house on an expense budget of just \$800. Admission was free, but the nonprofit organization that sponsored the open house earned income from dime-a-pound aircraft rides donated by local pilots.

That contrasts with the million-dollars-plus budget required to conduct a major two-day open house and airshow at a large metropolitan airport. In-between is an event the size of the Scottsdale Air Fair. The two-day open house features a range of civil, military, and warbird static displays and fly-bys, attracts about 25,000 people, and operates on a budget of about \$300,000.



## Corporate Sponsorship

An extremely important component of budgeting for a successful open house is securing cash and in-kind corporate sponsors. Without such sponsorship, many open houses would end the weekend significantly in the red, which jeopardizes the future of the show.

An airport open house presents an opportunity for a sponsor to receive exposure before a large group of people from the community. Different sponsors seek different benefits from that exposure, ranging from goodwill in the community to a more direct benefit including increased sales. Before making a proposal to a potential corporate sponsor, try to determine what its sponsorship goals might be. It will help sell your proposal.

For example, a national soft drink manufacturer used to sponsoring hundreds of community gatherings across the country may not be persuaded to support your event based on your optimistic projections of how much product they will sell from soft drink stands at the open house.

Instead, the manufacturer is looking for a much bigger boost in sales of its product at area grocery stores. To win over that sponsor, you could propose to promote advance ticket sales at a reduced price, courtesy of the sponsor. The tickets must be bought at area grocery stores. The promotion steers people to the stores, where they are likely to buy the soft drink.

Sponsor visibility at the open house may be in the form of banners, company names and logos on the official program, advertisements in the program, mentions by the announcer throughout the event, invitations to a VIP party with display aircraft pilots and performers, and a tent assigned to the sponsor and its guests.

The actual out-of-pocket expenses for an open house will depend on the size and scope of the event and also on the extent of volunteer labor, donated equipment and supplies, and in-kind contributions. The airport management and FBOs can provide in-kind contributions such as fuel for static display aircraft; line personnel for directing and parking aircraft; police, fire, and rescue support; important crowd control equipment such as barricades and cones; and even portable toilets.

Pilots and aircraft owners who are active in the area business community are a great source of in-kind contributions, ranging from tents to printing services for programs and flyers.

Other in-kind contributions include discounts on overnight accommodations, loaner vehicles (cars and vans) to performers and owners of display aircraft while they are in town; golf carts for event staff; tents for exhibitors; public address equipment; and any other equipment or services necessary for staging the open house.

Potential sources of income include ticket sales, parking fees, vendor and exhibitor fees or receipts, program sales and advertisements, and merchandise sales (t-shirts with the open-house logo are popular items). In many cases, income from the open house is supplemented by funding from the airport owner (city or county) and corporate sponsors (more on corporate sponsors later).

When identifying sources of funding, don't overlook nontraditional opportunities. For example, the Plant City airport receives several thousand dollars from the Hillsborough County Airport Authority, which owns and operates the airport, in support of the airport's Strawberry Air Fest. But the event also receives several thousand dollars in tourist tax money dispensed by the county's tourism promotion department. The tourism dollars cannot be spent on Air Fest general operating expenses but must be devoted to promotions that could produce additional "bed nights," or bookings at area motels, hotels, and resorts.

**Tip:** The adage "you have to spend money to make money" applies to airport open houses. It may take cash deposits to secure equipment, service, and display aircraft commitments, for example, so start the planning process with some working capital in hand.

**Tip:** Structure your expenses and income so that you don't have to rely on paid admission to at least break even. That way, if inclement weather depresses attendance, the show won't automatically be a financial disaster.

**Tip:** Don't make assumptions about who might be willing to sponsor an airport open house. Be creative in identifying opportunities. For example, one open-house organizer signed up an area utility company as a sponsor. The utility was facing potential deregulation and needed to generate goodwill among its customers and, ultimately, support for its position on deregulation. Sponsorship "bought" the utility a large, captive, and demographically qualified audience at the open house. The utility got to polish its image and, through handouts and an exhibit, conduct a low-key informational campaign on the deregulation issue.

Put a trusted lieutenant in charge of sponsor relations at the open house. That person should ensure the sponsor's accommodations—tent, chairs, refreshments, and anything else called for in the sponsorship agreement—are ready at the start of the event and supported throughout. You want your sponsors to be happy and eager to participate next year.

## Static Display

A static display of aircraft is the heart of an airport open house. Strive for a wide variety of display aircraft—hot air balloons; warbirds; ultralights; experimentals; antiques and classics; seaplanes and amphibians; a full range of certificated general aviation aircraft

**Tip:** When parking static display aircraft, avoid segregating by type. Alternate warbirds with experimentals, ultralights, and other dissimilar types to ensure that the crowds will be exposed to the full range of aircraft.

from primary trainers to, if your airport can accommodate them, turboprops and business jets (encourage flight training and maintenance school and new-aircraft sales displays). Invite aircraft that will highlight general aviation's value to the community—medevac and law enforcement aircraft; cropdusters and firefighting aircraft (if applicable); and AirLifeLine or other volunteer airlift corps. If your event is being held at a large airport, don't over-

look the potential for big aircraft such as a FedEx Boeing 727; helicopters; and military aircraft. They may not all fit the definition of general aviation, but they will appeal to your visitors.

The typical compensation for participating in an open house static display is a full tank of fuel on departure. Military participants usually specify that they be able to purchase fuel at their military contract rate.

If it's a two-day event, visiting crews are provided with hotel rooms and meals, and, in some cases, vehicles. Upon arrival, all static display participants should be given a welcome package containing show instructions and schedule, a map of the area, a thank-you gift, and an invitation to the sponsor's party.

A place to begin the search for warbird participants is the Confederate Air Force (CAF), headquartered in Midland, Texas (telephone 915/563-1000; Web site [www.confederateairforce.org](http://www.confederateairforce.org)). With more than 80 CAF squadrons around the country, the headquarters staff can advise you where to find a specific type of warbird or the nearest CAF unit.



Another resource is area aviation museums, many of which have restored, flying aircraft available for static display. Local EAA chapters can direct open-house planners to interesting experimental aircraft in the area.

Regional aviation publications are valuable resources for prospecting for display aircraft. Six months in advance of the event is not too soon to publish a notice soliciting owners of interesting and unusual aircraft to participate in your event.

Military aircraft are popular static display attractions, but tight budgets have had an effect on the services' flexibility to dispatch aircraft and crews to community open houses. Contact the following to inquire about military aircraft participation at an open house.

### Army:

Office of the Chief of Public Affairs  
United States Army  
Attn: Community Relations Team  
1500 Army Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20310-1500  
Telephone 703/697-6159; fax 703/697-2159

### Navy:

Navy Office of Information  
Attn: Aviation (OI-512)  
1200 Navy Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20350-1200  
Telephone 202/685-6666; fax 202/685-6669

### Marine Corps:

CMC (PAC), HQ USMC  
Attn: Aviation Coordinator  
The Pentagon, Room 5E671  
Washington, DC 20050  
Telephone 703/614-1034 or 1054;  
fax 703/614-2358

### Air Force:

SAF/PAN  
Attn: Aviation Support  
1690 AF Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20350-1690  
Telephone 703/693-2558; fax 703/693-9601

**Tip:** If owners of interesting aircraft can't agree to putting them on static display because of the time commitment or other factors, try to arrange for them to make several fly-bys of the airport without landing. This is commonly done with high-performance military aircraft.

Make sure the static display includes some hands-on aircraft—avoid the appearance of a solid line of cordoned-off aircraft. At Van Nuys, an area aviation maintenance school donated a real, but nonflying, homebuilt aircraft modified to be “kid friendly.” Major parts on the aircraft, dubbed “Vinnie,” are labeled and their functions explained, and kids are encouraged to touch the airplane and climb into the cockpit.

Each display aircraft should be staffed throughout the day to answer questions and provide security. Ask participants to bring informational signs or provide text that can be used to make signs.

## Flight Operations

If the airport has an air traffic control tower, the tower chief will be responsible for the safety of all aircraft operations, including arrivals, departures, and ground movements. This calls for extensive preshow planning and coordination during the event between the tower, airport authorities, and open-house managers.

If there is no control tower on the field, a responsible and experienced person should be given “air boss” authority to oversee aircraft movements.

If a large volume of nonbased aircraft are expected to fly to the open house, or if extensive fly-bys are planned that will affect normal aircraft operations, have the airport manager file a notam with the controlling FAA flight service station, announcing the open house.

## Temporary Tower

It's possible to put a temporary ATC tower in operation at a nontowered airport. There are no specific rules to determine when a temporary tower is justified. Factors that might warrant consideration of a temporary control tower are expected heavy volume of arrivals and departures, runway layout, configuration of area airspace (for example, the existence of restricted or prohibited areas that could pose a problem for transient traffic), and the effect of the open house on traffic and other airports in the area.

A request for a temporary tower and controller staffing should be made to the controlling FAA regional office. The request should not declare that a dangerous situation could arise without a control tower. Rather, it should emphasize that a temporary tower would be in the best interest of safety, expedite the flow of aircraft to and from the airport, and minimize delays to surrounding traffic in affected airspace.

If the request is approved, the FAA may ask for reimbursement for the cost of setting up the tower and related equipment and for expenses of sending controllers to the event. (The controllers themselves do not receive additional compensation.) Lobby for controllers who are experienced at working high-density general aviation traffic.

The temporary tower facility could be an existing building on the airport, a mobile tower cab (each FAA region has at least one), or even a flatbed truck. The military also may agree to provide a mobile cab.

It's important to get started on a temporary tower effort early. The mobile cabs are in short supply and must be scheduled many months in advance. Also, it's vital that open-house organizers meet with controllers



on site well in advance so that procedures can be worked out.

## Concessions and Vendors

Food and drink concessions are necessary and desirable at an open house. Good quality and sanitary conditions are the basic requirements. An excellent way to

win support in the community is to invite area nonprofit organizations, such as the Rotary Club, Lions Club, church groups, or Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, to set up concession stands at the open house. One caveat, however: Insist on experience. Don't risk your event on first-time nonprofit food concessionaires.

Local regulations may require that all vendors have an appropriate permit or license (one-day

or event permits may be available) and that food vendors show evidence of having completed food safety training.

Local custom will dictate whether a nonprofit concessionaire should pay open-house organizers a flat fee, a percentage of gross or net revenue, or nothing at all for the opportunity to work the event. Commercial concessionaires and exhibitors, on the other hand, expect to pay to set up shop at an airport open house.

The simplest way to charge a vendor or commercial exhibitor is a flat fee. At one open house, each food vendor and exhibitor pays a \$100 fee for the two days. Another open house charges just \$20 if the vendor does not require electrical power and \$30 with power.

At Reid-Hillview Airport's annual open house, the airport association hosts a pancake breakfast—but it's not limited to pilots flying in. Anyone can come, and members of the local community come out early to meet local pilots and learn more about the airport.

In Watsonville, California, an annual fly-in achieves some of the same community support benefits as an open house—the local Lions Club, Rotary Club, Chamber of Commerce, and other community service groups handle the food concessions.

Vendors are interested in the size of the crowd, of course. Don't overpromise before the event or you'll quickly gain that reputation among area vendors. Also, don't overload the open house with too many vendors and exhibitors, or no one will be successful.

**Tip:** Check with organizers of other area events that draw a similar-size crowd on how much they charge. They also should be able to identify the most desirable vendors in terms of quality, performance, and reliability.

## Insurance

Typically, the open-house sponsor is required by the airport owner to have liability insurance for the open house, with the airport owner named on the policy as an additional insured. Commercial vendors working the open house also should provide evidence of liability insurance.

Like most other considerations, the amount of liability insurance coverage you'll need depends on the size and scope of the open house and the specific requirements imposed by the airport owner. The good news is that event liability insurance premiums are relatively inexpensive.

Typical limits range from \$500,000 to about \$2 million, with \$1 million a common amount. A local EAA chapter that sponsors an airport open house can obtain liability insurance through the national EAA. Event insurers are listed on the ICAS Web site.

**Tip:** If you plan on providing vehicles to fly in pilots or golf carts on the ramp during the event, you should confirm that vehicle liability insurance is included in your policy. If not, arrange for it.

**Tip:** If you plan to set up for the open house a day in advance and clean up the day after it ends, you'll need to extend your premises liability insurance to cover those days. The added coverage imposes only a small percentage increase in the premium.

## Aircraft Rides

Getting up in the air is what airports are all about, and for many nonpilots a ride in an airplane or helicopter is the ultimate lure that attracts them to an airport open house.

Commercial helicopter and biplane sightseeing operators are popular attractions at open houses. Coordinate with the air traffic control tower (if applicable) on where to stage the aircraft for passenger loading and unloading and designating a flight path.

Penny-a-pound (nickel- or dime-a-pound in today's dollars) airplane rides are a cherished tradition and still a centerpiece of the small-town airport open house. Generally it's easy to find local pilots willing to donate their time and aircraft to conduct the flights.

Typically, pilot volunteers are provided with fuel, or at least given a discount on the price. However, at press time, a thorny legal issue involving this kind of charity flying still had not been resolved.

An FAA policy statement issued in 1999 requires pilots to enroll in an FAA-approved random drug testing program prior to engaging in charitable passenger-



carrying flight operations, such as might be conducted at an airport open house. Unfortunately, to meet the FAA's drug testing requirements, a pilot will have to spend in excess of \$200 and considerable paperwork to engage in an FAA-approved drug-testing program.

On March 30, 1999, AOPA President Phil Boyer sent a letter to FAA Administrator Jane Garvey urging the FAA to reconsider the new policy and once again permit pilots to engage in charitable sightseeing flight operations without enrolling in an FAA-approved random drug testing program.

As of early June 1999, the FAA has issued approximately 20 exemptions for charity and "community event" sightseeing flights.

FAA responded with an amended exemption process that grants the "Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, on behalf of its members," an exemption from specific FARs "to the extent necessary to allow AOPA member-pilots to conduct local sightseeing flights at charity or community events, for compensation or hire, without comply-

ing with certain anti-drug and alcohol misuse prevention requirements of Part 135," subject to certain limitations. There are 10 limitations including a requirement that charity flights be conducted in day VFR within 25 miles of the airport, pilots must have at least a Private pilot certificate, be familiar with regulations concerning drug-free operations, and make a logbook entry for each event in which the pilot participates.

For complete details, call AOPA's Pilot Hotline at 800-USA-AOPA or login to [www.aopa.org/forms/exemption.cfm](http://www.aopa.org/forms/exemption.cfm)

**Tip:** The only safe way to avert potential problems involving the drug testing issue is to scrupulously avoid providing any sort of compensation, including fuel discounts and donations, to pilots who fly "paying" passengers at an open house. If passengers do not pay for the flight in any manner, and the pilots receive no in-kind compensation, the drug-testing requirement does not apply. That is the case with Young Eagles flights, which are free to kids taking their first general aviation airplane ride.

- Public safety demonstrations (fire, police, and rescue)
- Live music
- A "kids zone" with clowns, face painting, hands-on activities, rides, and amusements
- Motorcycle and car shows (antiques, classics, hot rods, customs, etc.)
- Post office first-edition aviation stamp cancellations
- Tethered hot air balloon rides
- Radio-controlled model demonstrations
- Historical exhibits
- A pavilion with civic, military service, and business exhibits



## Promotion and Media Coverage

A meticulously planned and organized airport open house is doomed to failure if too few people know about it. Effective promotion is a key to success.

Consider inviting a small number of local media representatives out to the airport well in advance of your event—maybe one reporter each from the local newspaper, radio station, and the television station that covers your area (if you have a lot of local media, consider several small groups). Show off the airport, explain its value to the community, and cap off the experience by offering a free orientation flight. AOPA's *Fly A Reporter* brochure offers some great suggestions for doing this. Your early efforts to develop a relationship with the media will help when it comes time to publicize your open house event, and could even result in some positive coverage for general aviation.

## Other Activities

Not every activity or exhibit at the open house has to be directly related to aviation. People come to an open house expecting an enjoyable family day out of doors. Kids, especially, have boundless energy, restless curiosity, and short attention spans. Finally, an open house should celebrate the community. Give visitors an interesting and informative variety of things to see and do. Following are some suggestions that have proven popular at airport open houses:



**Tip:** One area where an in-kind contribution can be especially effective is in promotion. Solicit area media—broadcast and print—for in-kind contributions by offering to trade sponsorship recognition at the open house for advertising and promotional space. One open-house organizer offers to pay for promotional space or air time at a reduced rate in exchange for a presence at the event. It's hard for any business to turn down cash, so it's a successful tactic. For every \$500 in cash he spends with local media, he receives \$2,000 worth of print or broadcast advertisements.



**Tip:** Early in the morning on the first day of the open house, call the daily newspaper and television station(s), and ask to speak to the assignment editor. Brief the editor on the open house, stress the photo opportunities, and offer assistance in facilitating a story. Weekends are slow news days, and assignment editors, who should recognize the attraction and visual impact of local aviation-related stories, likely will welcome your call.

**Tip:** Many television stations air an extended sports show Sunday evening to report the results of weekend games. This opens up time in the regular news segment—and an opportunity to fill that time with great airport open-house images. Keep this in mind when talking to stations about coverage.

At least four months in advance of the open house, send notices of the event to regional and national aviation publications for inclusion in their calendar sections. Send flyers to all general aviation airports in the region, inviting pilots to attend the open house.

As your date approaches, use all mass media outlets—major and community newspapers, regional magazines, and area television and radio stations—to secure public service announcements promoting the open house.

In addition to having paid and in-kind media advertisements promoting the event, Torrance Air Fair organizers distribute posters and 2,000 flyers (provided

by a corporate sponsor) around the community. The flyer also is inserted in the daily newspaper just prior to the open house. Organizers also secure permission from municipal authorities to erect Air Fair promotional banners across major streets in area cities. Finally, two weeks in advance of the open house weekend, they provide 25 local movie theaters with a promotional slide—picturing an upside-down wing-walker—to display on screen prior to the start of a movie.

Along with advertising and promotion, seek prior editorial coverage of the event. Press releases are a staple of media prospecting, and AOPA offers excellent guidance on how to write effective press releases.

To increase the chances of getting prior editorial coverage, produce a series of press releases over a period of time, each focusing on a different aspect of the open house. Meigs Field Open House organizers came up with a story angle by having a Chicago city councilman spearhead the passage of a proclamation naming the day of the Open House as “Meigs Field Day.”

Torrance Air Fair organizers hold a media day 10 days in advance of the open house to give local media outlets plenty of time to research and produce stories. Another media day is held the day before the Air Fair opens. Typically, this features military aircraft and crews that will participate in the static display and fly-bys.

Invite television and radio stations to do live broadcasts from the airport during the event. Don't ignore the importance of post-show editorial coverage, especially on Sunday-night television news and in Monday-morning newspapers. These are heavy viewer/reader opportunities that can help make an impression of the event in the minds of the public, resulting in better attendance next year.

## Measuring Success

The last visitor has left the airport grounds. Tired volunteers are helping to pick up trash and collect equipment. A few stragglers from the static display line are preparing to depart. All that's left is to finish cleaning up and get over to the staff party in one of the corporate hangars. It's time to ask the Big Question: Was it a successful event?

Just how do you measure the success, or lack of it, of an airport open house? Attendance is an obvious yardstick. A crowd numbering in the tens of thousands has to be considered a success under any circumstances. Sheer numbers don't tell the whole story, however. The “quality” of the audience is important. If you have good representation from influential people in the community—elected officials, administrators, business and civic leaders—and they voice satisfaction with the open house, that's an excellent measure of success. If exhibitors are happy with the results, that's also a good measure of success.

Financial results are important in determining the success of the event. At Torrance, Air Fair organizers want to finish the Air Fair having earned “seed money” to facilitate planning the next year’s Air Fair. At Ft. Myers, Florida, the sponsoring EAA chapter has a financial goal for Aviation Days of maintaining a bank account reserve that would absorb losses the following year if the event were drowned out by a November storm.

Losing money at the open house is a problem that calls for a thorough review of the process before planning begins for next year’s show. “Profit” is in the eye of the beholder, however. A show that increases goodwill for the airport within the community is fundamentally successful. The goal should be to build on that aspect and work on turning around the financial performance.

This guide includes a comprehensive, generic event planning checklist (see page 17). It includes airshow, military, and warbird activities, but the list can be customized for your specific situation and agenda.

## Considering an Airshow?

As we mentioned earlier, adding an airshow to your airport open house can help to attract a much bigger crowd—but the complexity of planning the event, and the cost of staging it, will rise exponentially.

Safety considerations are paramount in deciding whether or not to have an airshow, but don’t let location drive the safety issue. The Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, which operates College Park Airport, has been staging a public Aero Fair with airshow every fall under some challenging conditions. College Park Airport is located in highly developed suburban Washington, D.C., right next to the University of Maryland’s main campus.

To say that space at College Park for an airshow is limited would be an understatement—the single runway is but 2,610 feet long and bounded by trees on one end and a Washington Metro subway station on the other. As the College Park experience demonstrates, just because an airport is small and/or located in a developed area doesn’t mean a safe and successful airshow and open house can’t be held. Airshow safety is more an issue of planning and organization than location.

The question of whether or not to have an airshow at an airport open house should be decided on economic and philosophical grounds. Because of the cost, which can range from \$10,000 for a modest one-day show to \$250,000 or more for two days featuring national, professional performers, corporate sponsorship of an airshow is an absolute must. Even then, organizers could end the weekend having lost money.

There is no question that airshows draw crowds.



The International Council of Air Shows (ICAS), which represents the airshow industry, states that except for professional baseball, airshows draw more spectators in this country than any other attraction. That’s an impressive record that attests to the public’s unflagging enthusiasm for flying machines. Because of the obvious safety issues involved as well as the costs and the crowds, staging an airshow in conjunction with an airport open house adds many layers of complexity and challenges to the planning process.

For example, aerobatic performances trigger the involvement of the FAA in approving and planning the event. Contact your local FAA flight standards district office (FSDO) at least 60 days in advance of the open house to discuss airshow issues, but preferably at the beginning of the planning process. Formal application for a waiver of airspace must be made at least 45 days in advance of the event. (See sidebar.) Managing the airshow site calls for an “air boss,” an experienced and knowledgeable organizer and manager who controls all aircraft movements on the ground and in the air during an airshow.

## Airshow Advisory Circular

An airport open house with an airshow involving aerobatic maneuvers requires the involvement of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Advisory

Circular 91-45C, “Waivers—Aviation Events” provides guidance on what types of events and shows require FAA approval and involvement. In general, if the show includes aerobatic acts, airshow organizers must apply for a waiver from standard Federal Aviation Regulations operating rules regarding altitudes, airspeeds, and airspace. The AC provides guidance on completing FAA Form 7711-2, “Application for Waiver or Authorization.”

**Following is a brief excerpt from the introductory section of AC 91-45C.**

## Background

Numerous waivers are issued each year by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for the purpose of aviation events or aerial demonstrations. These waivers are issued based on the FAA policy that anytime the agency determines a proposed event will be in the public interest in terms of safety and environmental concerns, a waiver will be issued predicated on specific requirements of the event. Regardless of the purposes for which an aviation event is sponsored, events or show sites judged unsafe shall not be accepted for waiver or authorization consideration. Based on the foregoing, this AC is intended to explain many of the requirements necessary when considering the show site, facilities, the level of competence of participants, waivers and/or authorizations required, and other items of concern to the prospective aviation event sponsor.

## Definitions.

Many terms used in this AC are unique to aerial demonstration/aviation events; therefore, the following definitions shall enhance the understanding of their application:

a. **Aerobatic Flight.** The FAA has determined that for purposes of an aviation event, an aerobatic maneuver means an intentional maneuver in which the aircraft is in sustained inverted flight or is rolled from upright to inverted or from inverted to upright position. All standard aviation event aerobatic maneuvers such as slow rolls, snap rolls, loops, Immelmans, Cuban eights, spins, hammerhead turns, etc., may not be performed over congested areas or over spectators. Steep banked, level, climbing, or descending turns necessary during maneuvering between aerobatics are not considered to be aviation event aerobatic maneuvers. Normal positioning turns for high performance aircraft operated by the military regardless of angle or bank or pitch attitude, are not considered to be aviation event aerobatic maneuvers.

Normal maneuvers, such as steep turns, involved in air racing are not considered aerobatic.

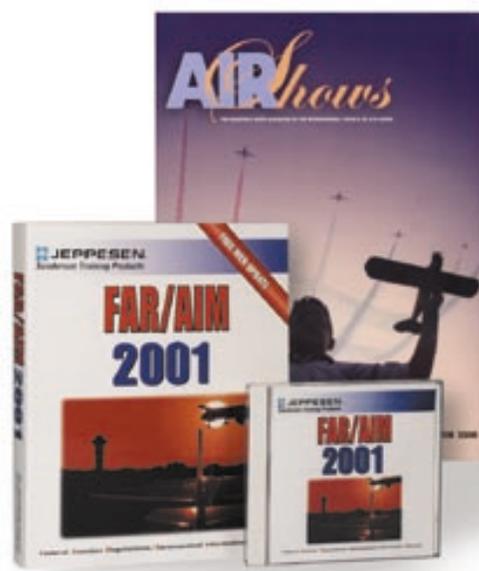
b. **Aviation Events** include airshows, air races, aerobatic contests, parachute demonstration jumps, practice areas designated for aerobatic proficiency or training, and balloon meets and races. Most events are held at or

immediately adjacent to an airport. An increasing number, however, are held offshore (within gliding distance of land), over water, in the vicinity of a state fair-ground, or at other off airport locations. Aerobatic school activities or aerobatic meets may occur which are not aviation events, contests, or races, even though a waiver must be issued. At these school activities or meets that are not advertised as aviation events, it may not be necessary to provide public aviation event policing and emergency facilities.

c. **Certificate of Waiver or Authorization.** FAA Form 7711-1, Certificate of Waiver or Authorization, is issued after proper application and approval, for the purpose of providing TEMPORARY RELIEF from certain designated Federal Aviation Regulations.

One way to stack the odds in favor of having a successful airshow is to hire a consultant and/or event organizer to direct the planning. These professionals have the knowledge, experience, and contacts in the industry and can make life immeasurably simpler for airport open-house planners. Compensation for airshow producers is handled in various ways, ranging from a flat fee to a percentage of net income.

Whether it's to identify a consultant or organizer, get information about performers, or just ask some basic questions about staging an airshow, your first point of contact should be ICAS, which is headquartered at 751 Miller Dr. SE, Suite F-4, Leesburg, Virginia 20175; telephone 703/779-8510; fax 703/779-8511; or e-mail “[icas@airshows.org](mailto:icas@airshows.org)”. ICAS also has an informative Web site ([www.airshows.org](http://www.airshows.org)) that lists members, event producers and consultants, and providers of airshow and event support services.



FAR/AIM courtesy of Jeppesen Sanderson, Inc.

## Sample Letters



 **County Municipal Airport**  
521 Aviation Road, Frederick, MD 21701 • 301-555-2175  
Attention: 301.6 • UNICOM/CTAF 122.725

**A**

[VIP guest's name]  
[VIP's title, if appropriate]  
[VIP's address]  
[City, state, zip code]

Dear [Courtesy title, VIP's last name],

On [event date], [sponsoring organization] will be holding an open house at [airport name]. Because of your interest in [continued support of, significant contributions to] the airport, we would like to invited you to attend the event as our special guest.

The event begins at [time] and continues until [time]. It will include tours of the airport businesses and facilities; a display of the various types of aircraft that use [airport name], including training aircraft, business aircraft, helicopters, medivac aircraft, and restored vintage airplanes. Local civic organizations will serve breakfast and lunch for a nominal fee. In addition, area civic and service organizations will provide informational displays, and a children's area will feature clowns, face painting, and helium-filled balloons. Airplane rides will be available for a nominal contribution [to charity name, if appropriate].

As our special guest, we would like to offer you preferred parking, a personal guided tour of the airport, and access to our VIP lounge, which will be stocked with snacks and cold soft drinks.

We hope that you will be able to join us. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call our VIP coordinator, [name], at [telephone number].

Sincerely,  
[Name]  
[Title or position]

 **County Municipal Airport**  
521 Aviation Road, Frederick, MD 21701 • 301-555-2175  
Attention: 301.6 • UNICOM/CTAF 122.725

**B**

[Potential sponsor's name]  
[Potential sponsor's title]  
[Potential sponsor's address]  
[City, state, zip code]

Dear [Courtesy title, potential sponsor's last name],

[Sponsoring organization] will be holding an open house at [airport name] on [event date]. Because of your company's strong commitment to serving our community [reliance upon the airport, continued support of the airport], we would like to discuss with you some sponsorship opportunities regarding the event.

Your financial support [use of vehicles, equipment, or services; promotional support; donation of food or soft drinks] will help us to conduct a high-quality, comprehensive event and provide an important service to the community. Of course, we would be pleased to discuss any other ways in which you might like to participate. In recognition of your support, [company name] will be mentioned prominently in our advertising and in the open house program, and we will extend VIP privileges to you and [insert number; may want to modify based on the amount of support] other [company name] employees.

The event will include tours of the airport businesses and facilities, as well as a display of the various types of aircraft that use [airport name]. Local civic organizations will provide food for a nominal fee. There will also be informational displays, a children's activity area, and airplane rides

We hope that we can count on your support. I will call you soon to discuss this subject, but if you have any questions, please call me at [telephone number].

Sincerely,  
[Name]  
[Title or position]

### Examples:

A - VIP Invitation Letter

B - Sponsor Recruitment Letter



**Examples:**  
C - Thank You Letter  
D - Sample Press Release



## Event Planning Checklist/Outline

The checklist was provided by Centerpoint, an airshow management company based in Longwood, Florida. It is a compilation of 21 years of experience gathered by Robert B. Sheffield as he has organized and conducted airport open houses and airshows.

### I. EMERGENCY CONTINGENCY PLAN

The Emergency Plan

- Emergency accident/incident plan**
  - Ensure it's in compliance with the Airport Emergency Plan
- Military aircraft accident**
  - Who's in charge?
- Civilian aircraft accident**
- Identify critical times**
- Identify possible incidents**
  - Where accidents might occur
  - What kind of situation
  - Automobile accidents (on the way in/out)
  - Spectator/auto accident
  - Heat injuries
  - Aircraft on-site
  - Aircraft off-site
- Termination of alert**
  - Whether the show must go on or be stopped
- Emergency communications plan**
- Identify medical resources**
  - City, county, state agencies, law enforcement agencies, emergency medical team(s), fire rescue team, hospital emergency plan, life-flight helicopter

### II. CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORIZATION

FAA Form 7711-2:

- Secure and coordinate with the local FSDO 120 to 90 days prior to the first event date. In accordance with AC 91-45C, Chapter 2, Section 1, paragraph 18c, an application for an aviation event must be submitted at least 45 days before the date of the scheduled event.**

- Ensure you got what you requested: altitudes, wing-walkers (no seatbelts), parachutists, jet team, DoD, waiver, acro maneuvers. Forward a copy to your performers.**

### III. MOA (Military Operations Area)

- Secured for press day**

### IV. CONTRACTS REVIEWED

- Performers**
- Concessions and novelties**
- Independent contracted laborers**

### V. INDEPENDENT SAFETY OBSERVER:

- Monitors the airshow and recognizes potential dangerous or unsafe conditions.**

### VI. PERFORMER PACKETS

- Maps**
- Show schedule**
- Important phone numbers**
- Accommodation arrangements**
- Transportation plan**
- Shuttle schedule/routes**
- Party passes**
- Local entertainment (conventioner booklets)**
- Scheduled performer briefings**
- Emergency contact form**

### VII. STATIC DISPLAY AIRCRAFT

- Personnel sign-in sheet with phone numbers (in case of emergency)**
- Static display aircraft list to the FBO**
- Weight of aircraft (does not exceed weight capacity of the static display ramp)**
- Arrival plan**
- Departure plan**
- Aircraft movement plan**
- Flight plan on departure**
- Parking plan**

- Barriers/stanchions
- Chocks
- Refueling
- POL
- Signage (information & no smoking)
- Stairs (up and down)
- Tiedown availability

### VIII. TRANSPORTATION:

- Military team requirements
  - Maps in vehicles, fill gas tanks, special refueling procedures
- Performer requirements
- Bus schedule for static display aircraft
- Spectator transportation from parking area

### IX. QUARTERS/ACCOMMODATIONS:

- Hotel Assignments
  - Civilian performers, military team, static display, dignitaries
- Smoking/nonsmoking rooms
- Single or double requirements

### X. AIRSHOW SITE:

- Safety briefing room
- Designate and inform participants on arrival
- Equipment
  - Chairs, tables, charts
  - Maps, paper, and pens available
  - Weather information, FAA available
  - Map of site; brief the announcer
  - Public safety announcements
  - Sponsor announcements
  - Military teams brief/debriefing room
- Required information in accordance with AC 91-45C, Chapter 2, para. 25-27
- Operations office/emergency command center
- Phone lines
- Fax machine
- Computer
- Typewriter
- Copy machine

- Office helpers
- Map of the area
- Establish:
  - Crowd line, barrels, fencing, rope
  - Security
  - Aerobatics box
  - An outlined spectator area drawn on a map
  - Position and location of fire extinguishers and type
  - VIP area
  - Special needs area
  - Parking area
  - First aid area
  - Emergency medical equipment

- Airport tenants (How does this show infringe on the airport tenants?)

#### They will need access to:

- Work area
- Parking area
- Airshow insurance
  - Airshow liability
  - Accident (volunteers)
  - Property theft/damage
  - Workers compensation
  - Liquor liability
  - Fireworks
  - Pyrotechnics/Explosives
  - General liability
  - Weather insurance
  - Passenger liability
  - Product liability
  - Vehicle liability
  - Vehicle collision

- Fire marshal permits

- Concession company
  - Health permits
  - Resupply area
  - Communications

- Novelty company
  - Program sales staff
  - Resupply area

- Port-O-Lets
  - On site and servicing scheduled
  - Spectator facilities, handicapped facilities, commercial displays, parking area, VIP

facilities, air boss, portable tower, military team requirements

- Public address system**
  - Power (generator), amplifier, speaker and speaker stands, microphones, wireless
  - microphone
- Trash collection points**
  - Scheduled clean-up after each show, dumpsters required, trash barrels on site, trash bags (it maybe easier to pull a full bag out of the trash barrel, tie off to close and replace a trash bag in the barrel.)
- Volunteer check-in point**
  - Lost-and-found booth
  - Map of the area, holding area for lost children, coloring books, stuffed animals, identification method, log-in sheet/who recovered the child?
- Public telephones**
- Commercial booth space/exhibits, sign-in area, military recruiters, chairs and tables, will fuel in the building be a problem (remote-control airplanes)?**
- Media booth**
  - Staffed, materials available, map of the area, credentials available, show schedule available
- Static displays**
  - Roped off (if there is a requirement)
  - Fuel spills, signage, stairs (up and down)
- First aid room**
  - Cots, water, EMS team properly staffed, communications
- Tents**
  - Information booth, lost-and-found booth, lost-child booth, water trailers, ticketing area, corporate sponsors, performer autograph area, medical/first-aid parking area
- Airshow signage**
  - Aircraft signage, parking signage, special-needs signage, off-airport signage, ticket booth signage and prices, first-aid locations

## **XI. AIRPORT**

- Alternate airport landing facilities**  
(emergency landings)

- FOD (foreign object damage), determine clean-up**
- Fire extinguisher/fire bottles**
- Aerial photographs**
- Keys to gates and hangers**
- Airport signage**
- Perimeter secure**
- Taxiways and runways swept**
- Aerobatics box sterile**
- Jet team flight line in place**
- Crowd line secure**
- Grass mowed in parking area/pyro area**  
be cautious of warm mufflers on the dead grass.)
- Hangar space requirements**
  - Civilian performer requirements, military team requirements, commercial display requirements
- Hanger servicing**
  - Floors swept, bird droppings removed, electrical requirements, servicing hangar restrooms, fire extinguishers
- Establish “fly-in” policy**
  - Fly-in parking area, ticketing procedures and method
- Hazmat team available**
  - Determine spills, clean-up/plan and procedures, reporting procedures, waste management procedures
- Fire and rescue team**
  - Aircraft rescue and firefighter, briefed of air-show schedule, types of different aircraft involved, map of area in ready room.

## **XII. FIXED BASED OPERATOR (FBO)**

- Ground support equipment**
- Ramp crew (qualifications)**
- FBO re-fuel plan**
  - Who pays, method of payment, military credit card, military standard forms
- Tugs available and fueled**
  - Tow bars, starter units
- POL available**
- Fuel type and quantity availability**
- Type of trucks and nozzle flow rate**
- Fly-in aircraft servicing procedures**
- Smoke oil**

- Designated storage area, resupply truck, dispense method, hand pump/motor

### XIII. PARKING:

- Establish “hot ramp parking area”  
(later these vehicles could become a hazard to emergency vehicles or traffic)
- Parking plan
- Alternate parking plan (in case you lose your parking because of excessive rain)
- How are the spectators coming in?
- How are the spectators going out?
- Civilian police briefed
- Emergency routes
- Military teams route
- Performer route
- Adequate amount of parking attendants on site
- Alternate parking site (overflow parking)
- Handicapped parking availability
- Special needs
- VIP parking area
- Performer parking area
- Military teams parking area

### XIV. TRAFFICKING:

- Outside the air-show site
  - Arrival access roads
- Inside the airshow site
  - Intersection traffic to parking areas
- Hot ramp area
  - Proper vehicle authorization
- Emergency routes
- Performer routes

### XV. SECURITY:

- Established authorized “person on the hot ramp”
- Perimeter secure
- Copy of the credentials/security passes
- Ticket sellers
  - Start up cash/money float (change)
- Ticket takers

- Crowd line secure
- 24-hour security

### XVI. MEDICAL:

- Ambulance(s) on site
- Physician requirements
- Life Flight helo availability
- Local hospitals advised of event
- Signage to help locate a medical facility
- Communications

### XVII. COMMUNICATIONS:

- Ground operations requirements
- Air operations requirements
- Medical requirements
- Security requirements
  - Law enforcement, crowd control
- Parking attendants
- Radio sign-out sheet
- Cell phones
- Back-up equipment and chargers
- Communication net
  - Ground operations net, emergency net, security net, parking net

### XVIII. HOSPITALITY:

- Hangar party
  - Equipment, tables, chairs
- Caterer contract
- Band/DJ
  - Contract, staging, electrical
- Beverages
  - Beer and wine, method to identify minors, nonalcoholic
- Facility lighting
- VIP invitations
- Pilots lounge
  - Message centerboard, chairs, tables, phone (to contact unit or family)
- Meal schedule
  - Volunteers, staff

## **XIX. CORPORATE SPONSORS:**

- Tents
- Tables/linens
- Chairs
- Catering
- Resupply
- Trash
- Security
- Credentials/passes/parking
- Area for military team guests

## **17. WATER:**

- Spectator
  - Fixed faucet locations, water buffalo(s), resupply, tent coverage cups, trash, ice signage
- Performers
  - Ice, cold drinks, water

## **XXI. ON-SITE VEHICLES:**

- Establish vehicles on the hot ramp policy
- Establish refueling plan
- Key control and spare keys available
- Turn-in plan
- Golf carts
  - Rental agreement, quantity required, concessions requirements, medical requirements, insurance
- Automobiles
  - Military team requirements, performer requirements, special requirements, insurance
- Pick-up trucks
  - Performer requirements, smoke oil resupply, trash collection crew, hot pit transportation for performers
- Insurance

## **XXII. SPECIAL SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS:**

- Heavy equipment
  - Crane (big enough to lift the largest aircraft; doesn't necessarily have to be on hand;

however, on-call may be good planning)

- Generator(s) requirements for electricity

## **XXIII. ACCOUNTING:**

- Determine performer method of payment schedule
- Advance payments to performers
- Military team advance payments
- Arrange for the handling and accounting of cash payments
- Checks signed on short notice
- Arrange for novelties closeout
- Arrange for concessions closeout
- Prepare air-show profit/loss statement
- Cash pick-up at ticketing booths

## **XXIV. TICKETING:**

- Prior to the airshow:
  - Establish advance ticket sales
  - Monitor advance ticketing sales
  - Establish coupon redemption
- During the airshow
  - Arrange for qualified staffing
  - Staff each booth accordingly
  - Heavy-flow areas/low-flow areas
  - Arrange for cash pick-ups
  - Arrange for cash advance
  - Cash drawers/money bags/aprons
- Tentage
  - Tents at each ticketing area
- Signage
  - Ticket prices
- Support
  - Water/ice/coolers
  - Food/lunches for staff

## **XXV. MEDIA:**

- Advance publicity
- Coordinate commercial television and radio time availability
- Research media buy
- Determine media plan (budget)

**Television commercials** (30-second spots)

**Video**

- Background music track
- Voice-over talent
- Video production studio
- Sponsors logo/placement/number of times shown
- Produce “raw footage” tape for news stations
- Acquire “on air” interview schedule

**Radio commercials** (60-second spots)

- Voice-over talent
- Background music track
- Sound recording studio
- Acquire “on air” interview schedule

**Secure advance publicity materials**

- Jet team
- Performers
- History of airshow
- Interesting numbers and facts
- Photographs (8” x 10”)
- Video (3/4”, Beta)
- Narratives

**Publish the air-show advance publicity packet**

- Photographs
- Narratives on performers
- Particular specifications

- Flight time
- Hometown
- Aircraft/make, model, engine type, use
- Media booth location
- Show schedule/times

**Establish and inform the media of a “briefing room”** (This is helpful in gathering the media in case of an emergency)

## **XXVI. SIGNAGE:**

**Outside the airport**

**Direction signs to the parking area**

- General public, performers, VIP, special needs

**Direction signs to the ticketing booths**

**Ticketing/prices**

**Inside the airport**

**Commercial booths**

**Static displays**

**Medical stations**

**General public signage**

- Restrooms, telephones, baby changing area, information, lost and found

**Exiting the airport**

**Direction signage to control the flow of traffic**

**NOTES:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Disclaimer

The information contained in this booklet is intended as a guide in understanding the rules, procedures, and policies applicable to planning and conducting an airport open house.

It is not intended to replace the necessary research and review of applicable law or policies that may be required for a particular event. It is not intended to give legal advice or take the place of an attorney who can advise with respect to a particular situation.

While every care has been exercised in the preparation of this booklet, AOPA can not and does not accept responsibility for an individual's reliance on its contents.

Please share with us what does—and what does not—work for you at your open house event. We'll compile your reports and incorporate them into future updates of this publication.

## Credits

This publication was produced by the AOPA Regional Affairs Department

**Bill Dunn - Vice President**

**Miguel Vasconcelos - Director, Airports**

**Christy Gerencher - Manager, Airport Policy**

**Mary Catherine Tennant - Manager, ASN**

**Heidi Williams - ASN Analyst**







**A Publication of the AOPA Airport Support Network**  
421 Aviation Way, Frederick, Maryland 21701  
301-695-2000 • [www.aopa.org/asn](http://www.aopa.org/asn)