

AVIATION CAREERS SERIES
AIRPORT CAREERS



U S. Department of Transportation
Federal Aviation Administration

Office of Public Affairs
Aviation Education Program
PA-126-91

Including:

Airport Director/Manager
Assistant Airport Manager
Engineer
Safety Personnel
Service Person
Terminal Concessionaire
Fixed Base Operator
Lineperson



U S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Aviation
Administration**

INTRODUCTION

Aviation has progressed a long way since the 120-foot flight by Orville Wright on December 17, 1903, at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, and since the first US airline began operating between Tampa and St. Petersburg, Florida, on January 1, 1914. Today supersonic aircraft fly routinely across the oceans, and more than two million people are employed in aviation, the aerospace and air transportation industries.

In response to its Congressional mandate, the Federal Aviation Administration, as part of its effort to plan for the future of air transportation, conducts an Aviation Education Program to inform students, teachers, and the public about the Nation's air transportation system.

Aviation offers many varied opportunities for exciting and rewarding careers. The purpose of this brochure, and others in the FAA Aviation Careers Series, is to provide information that will be useful in making career decisions. Publications in this series include:

- 1. Pilots & Flight Engineers**
- 2. Flight Attendants**
- 3. Airline Non-Flying Careers**
- 4. Aircraft Manufacturing**
- 5. Aviation Maintenance and Avionics**
- 6. Airport Careers**
- 7. Government Careers**

There is also an introductory brochure entitled "Your Career in Aviation: The Sky's the Limit," and one entitled "Women in Aviation."

Free brochures may be obtained by sending a self-addressed mailing label with your request to: Superintendent of Documents, Retail Distribution Division, Consigned Branch, 8610 Cherry Lane, Laurel, MD 20707.

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Aviation Careers Series - Airport Careers

GENERAL INFORMATION

The airport is one of the most vital elements in our air transportation system. A well-equipped airport provides a variety of facilities for the aircraft and for crews and passengers. These include runways and taxiways, which may be lighted for day-and-night use; a terminal building with lounge areas for passengers, and possibly a restaurant and shops; automobile parking lots; ramp areas and hangars for aircraft storage; and maintenance shops for aircraft and avionics.

In the United States, there are about 13,000 airports and 4,000 heliports (landing sites for helicopters). About 5,000 of these landing facilities are used by the public. It may surprise you to learn that only about 650 airports are served by airlines; most of the Nation's airports are used by general aviation pilots and their aircraft. The atmosphere at these airports is usually a lot less hectic and pressured than the environment at a major airline facility.

Some airports are owned by municipalities--states, counties, and cities. Others are operated as privately-owned businesses.

Described in this brochure are eight different positions you can expect to find at an airport: airport director/manager, assistant airport manager, engineer, safety personnel, service person, terminal concessionaire, fixed base operator, and line person.

AIRPORT DIRECTOR/MANAGER

Nature of the Work

Airports are usually operated by a director or manager responsible either to the private owners of the airport or to the local government authorities. The airport manager must be a person of many talents. An airport manager must be competent in public relations, economics, business management, civil engineering, personnel management, labor relations, and politics. The manager is involved in executive business decisions and may be responsible for:

- 1. Making and enforcing airport rules and regulations.**
- 2. Planning and supervising maintenance and safety programs.**
- 3. Negotiating leases with airport tenants, such as airlines.**
- 4. Assessing the future needs of the airport and making recommendations.**
- 5. Setting up the airport budget.**

6. Promoting the use of the airport.

7. Training and supervising employees.

Depending upon the size of the airport, the manager may have one or more assistants, such as an assistant manager, engineer, controller, personnel officer, and maintenance superintendent. Supporting office workers (such as secretaries, typists, and clerks) also may provide assistance to the airport manager.

If the airport is operated by a city, the accounting and payroll functions may be done at city hall rather than at the airport. Conversely, some airport managers control a large professional staff and have total responsibility for all matters relating to the operation of the airport.

If self-employed as a small airport operator, the manager probably also operates an aircraft repair station, sells aviation fuel, gives flight lessons, and offers taxi or charter flights.

Working Conditions

Working conditions will vary greatly, depending upon the size of the airport. At a large airport, the manager works in an office usually located in the terminal building. Office hours are regular except in times of emergencies. Travel may be required to negotiate leases with airline tenants or to confer with state and federal officials. At a very small airport, the manager may spend long hours giving flying lessons, making charter flights, or working in the aircraft repair station.

In many cases the airport manager is a part of the local government and is involved in official meetings and community projects, especially those concerned with aviation.

Where the Jobs Are

The greatest number of airports with a permanent, full time work force are located in California, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas. However, there are full-service airports in every state of the Union.

Requirements to Enter the Job

As with any managerial position, the job of an airport manager requires experience and training. And, of course, large complex airports demand more in-depth background than do smaller ones. Managers of airports that provide airline service usually are required to have a college degree in one of the following areas: airport management, business administration, or aeronautical or civil engineering.

One study evaluated the importance of a number of educational areas in airport management. Besides a college degree, the study rated as “very important” a background in public relations, air transportation, business management, engineering, and personnel administration.

The airport manager may need to have experience as an assistant at an airport. Managers of small airports can qualify in some cases if they have only a high school diploma, but usually they must have a pilot certificate and three to five years of experience in jobs associated with airport services, such as fixed base operator, superintendent of maintenance, or assistant to the airport manager.

The manager must be familiar with state and federal regulations (especially those pertaining to airports), zoning laws, environmental impact analysis, legal contracts, security, aircraft rescue and firefighting (ARFF), and public relations. Airport managers must have strong leadership qualities, tact, initiative, good judgment, and an ability to get along with others. They should have a good understanding of the needs and concerns of the various users of the airport, including aircraft operators, concessionaires, and the general public.

The manager of a small airport may advance to an assistant director’s job at a larger airport. A manager also may move upward to the position of commissioner of airports or to a state-level job concerned with state regulation of airports. Appointments frequently are based on political activity and connections, especially if the job does not come under state or Federal regulations governing civil service.

Often entry-level positions are advertised locally rather than nationally because of civil service restrictions or local policy. Thus, these positions are hard to find. And even when a position is advertised nationally, competition is fierce. To lessen the number of applicants, many prospective employers require several years of experience, according to the American Association of Airport Executives.

Opportunities for Training

Numerous universities offer courses and degrees in airport administration, public administration, business administration, and aeronautical or civil engineering and flight training.

To meet the needs of communities that have airports, and to promote the highest degree of professionalism in airport management, the American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE) has an airport management accreditation program. This professional program improves the manager’s credentials as the responsible authority on aviation in the community, and it provides the manager national recognition as a qualified professional.

To gain accredited airport executive status, you must become an affiliate member of AAAE. Affiliate membership is open

to anyone who has active responsibility for the management or administration of a public airport. As an affiliate, with at least one year of experience in airport management, you may declare your intention of becoming an accredited airport executive. If you are 21 or older and have a four-year college degree, you may then be reclassified as an executive candidate member. Executive candidates lacking a degree may substitute civil airport managerial experience on a 2-for-1 basis, with a total of eight years of experience being the equivalent of a four-year college degree. Executive candidates are expected to complete the professional membership requirement within the three-year time limit.

Once these requirements are completed, the member may use the initials A.A.E. An accredited airport executive has voting privileges and may serve on the board of directors of the American Association of Airport Executives. For more information, you may write to:

American Association of Airport Executives
4212 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22302

Outlook For The Future

Aviation’s increasingly prominent role in the economy (the aviation industry annual payroll currently runs about \$25 billion nationwide) and the availability of quieter aircraft appear to have affected public attitudes about airport development in some communities. There are prospects for capacity expansion at airports that serve as major airline hubs or connection points such as Atlanta, Denver, and St. Louis. At major airports serving coastal population centers, such as Boston, Los Angeles, and New York, suitable sites for airport development are scarce because most developable land is already used for various purposes. At many of these locations, smaller “reliever” airports have been upgraded to serve general aviation traffic being relocated from congested airports. These trends will provide additional opportunities for airport managers and support staff.

OTHER AIRPORT CAREERS

Assistant Airport Manager: The assistant helps the manager carry out administrative responsibilities. The assistant may be in charge of maintenance employees, airport equipment, airport tenant relations, or any of the other kinds of work associated with an airport.

Depending upon the size of the airport, requirements for the job of assistant manager vary as do salaries. At some airports a high school diploma may be sufficient; at others the assistant manager must have a college degree in business or engineering. Large metropolitan airports typically require three to seven years of prior experience at airports served by a number of airlines.

Engineer: An airport engineer plans improvements and expansion of the airport, checks on plans submitted by architects and contractors, oversees construction, and handles real estate and zoning problems. An engineer may direct maintenance of runways, taxiways, hangars, terminal buildings, and grounds. Engineers are employed mostly by large airports. A degree in civil engineering is normally preferred, plus three to seven years of experience.

Safety Personnel: To meet the need for a high level of safety, most airports with airline service must maintain firefighting and rescue equipment. These airports employ a few trained firefighters and rescue workers, some of whom may be emergency medical technicians or paramedics. Typically, airport firefighters develop the skills of aircraft firefighting as well as building or structural firefighting.

Serviceperson: A serviceperson works under the direction of the airport manager or engineer and may perform one or more of the following activities:

1. *Cut grass on airport grounds and maintain shrubbery.*
2. *Operate snow removal equipment.*
3. *Service runway lights, replacing defective lamps and fuses.*
4. *Maintain the airport's electrical service, paint, and do general carpentry work on small repair jobs.*

Large airports employ workers who specialize in one of the aforementioned jobs--for example, airport electrician.

Many kinds of servicepersons are needed at airports, although small airports usually contract for required maintenance. Training, qualifications, wages, opportunity for advancement, and union agreements for these workers are the same as for other workers in the trades and crafts.

Terminal Concessionaires: Airport terminals provide many services for air passengers. There are restaurants, newsstands, gift and book shops, and car rental agencies. Skycap baggage service is also provided. (Only a few airlines employ skycaps; most leave this service to terminal concessions.) Workers in the airport flight kitchens cater to airlines that do not have their own flight kitchens.

Workers in these concessions are not on the airport manager's staff, but they are included here because of their place in the total employment picture of the airport.

Fixed Base Operator: A fixed base operator (FBO) is a retail firm that sells general aviation products or services at an airport. The FBO may employ one or two people, or it may have as many as one hundred workers. One or more of the following services are offered: aircraft fueling; airframe, engine, and/or instrument repairs; avionics sales and service; aircraft modifications; flight training; ground school; aircraft rentals and sales; and air taxi service and charter flights.

Depending upon the size and scope of the airport operations, the FBO employs linepersons, mechanics, avionics technicians, flight instructors, and aircraft sales persons. The FBO may also carry on a small aviation mechanics training operation, and if a licensed aviation mechanic, supervises the work of mechanics. Customer service personnel will often arrange for ground transportation and overnight accommodations for general aviation pilots and their passengers.

The FBO's place of business can be a small hangar or shop with adjoining office and perhaps a pilot's lounge. Or it can be an elaborate series of hangars, shops, offices, classrooms, and showrooms. The hours are determined by the amount of time the FBO wants to devote to the business.

The FBO is essentially an entrepreneur, the opportunities for increased business and income depend upon initiative and the ability to keep up with changes in aircraft, aircraft equipment, and services. The variety of activities in which an FBO can be involved offer some assurance of a stable income.

The requirements to become a fixed base operator are not clearly defined. Certainly an interest in aviation is basic. A pilot's license is not essential, but such training is useful since it provides a good understanding of the many functions of an FBO as well as contacts with pilots who may patronize the business.

Training in business administration also is helpful in setting up an efficient business operation, and it is proving to be essential to success in times of reduced general aviation activity brought on by the recent down-turn in the national economy.

Student pilot training has been in a decline in recent years, as have sales of new general aircraft--both of which have been traditional sources of income for many FBOs. The trend for growth from 1990 to 2001, according to an FAA study, is in the turbine-powered aircraft. This provides opportunities for a profitable business in the sale of jet fuel and other services to operators of corporate planes. However, a substantial financial investment in facilities would be required.

Lineperson: The fixed base operator employs linepersons or ramp service persons who meet arriving aircraft, guide them to parking spots, assist pilots in securing their aircraft, and otherwise serve the general aviation pilots and their passengers. These duties include fueling and servicing aircraft. One important function is reporting to the aircraft owners any signs of incipient trouble with their planes, such as fluid leaks and low tire pressure.

The lineperson at a general aviation facility has a lot more contact with the public than does someone who performs similar functions for an airline.

Linepersons are often young people who are interested in aviation and who begin their aviation careers by building up experience with aircraft under the guidance of a fixed base operator. They are usually paid an hourly rate and often work part time after school, on weekends, and during summers. With their earnings they often fly or take up an aviation mechanic's trade. The lineperson's job is an important basic career development step. It can lead to careers in airport administration, fixed base operation, aviation mechanics, air traffic control, and professional flying.

Other personnel who work either for the FBO or airport manager perform the usual duties of their chosen careers: controller, secretary, typist, etc. Salaries, qualifications, and training opportunities are the same as for other workers in these areas of employment.

GETTING STARTED AS A LINEPERSON

Daniel Sherman is Director of Facilities for Clay Lacy Aviation, which is a Fixed Base Operation (FBO) at Van Nuys Airport in California.

Line service involves taking care of aircraft--parking, fueling, towing. Our linemen are referred to as customer service people, since they deal strictly with corporate jets. Our clientele demand more attention whether it's having rental cars available, taking care of catering, putting ice and coffee aboard the airplane, or vacuuming the aircraft. A corporate jet might be transporting 15 to 18 people, and the service varies according to what the travelers need.

In terms of whom we hire, we prefer someone who has experience, simply because of the aircraft-- they're valued at more than \$20 million. So we deal with an elite group here. I know it's sort of a Catch 22. I don't rule out those who don't have experience, but if someone has a couple of years doing line service somewhere else, that person has a definite advantage.

We find that people who apply for line service are those who have a direct interest in aviation. Most are taking flight lessons or studying to become Airframe and Powerplant mechanics. The best place to start is at flight schools or FBOs that deal with small, general aviation airplanes. Work there to build experience being around aircraft. Then, get some contact with jets. Once you have experience dealing with jets, you can join an operation like ours.