

Briefings

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Five ways to engage stakeholders with your airport project

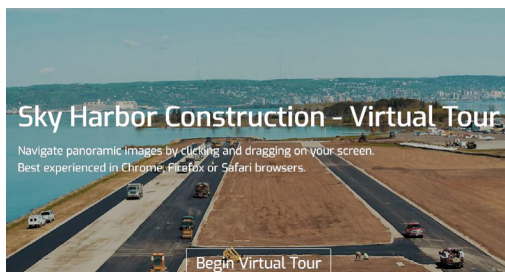
Communication is essential to finding success at home and in the workplace—whether you’re trying to determine who will pick up the kids from school or scheduling meetings with colleagues. And yet, in this time of COVID-19, it may feel like all you do is communicate. Between video calls, conference calls, emails, and calendar invites, if you’re working remotely you may be experiencing a bit of communication overload. As a result, effective, thoughtful, and concise communication has never been more important.

Project communication in aviation is no exception. Every airport project is unique, yet they all share a need for identifying stakeholders, being inclusive, and writing and messaging to reach the audience. A proactive engagement approach sets the stage for a successful airport project. Therefore, public involvement early and often in an airport project is vital.

Following are five ways you can create effective stakeholder engagement for your airport project.

1. Develop a public involvement plan

A public involvement plan (PIP) is used to document the goals and outcomes of the engagement efforts, audiences, and



Drones can facilitate real-time, interactive virtual project site walkthroughs. These tours not only reduce the need for site visits but can also save project owners time and money by allowing the project team and public stakeholders to log in from anywhere and interact with drone operators.

outreach techniques and tools proposed for your airport project. Whether this is a written document with steps and initiatives to follow or a discussion during the start of a project, having a plan promotes follow through and ensures the right stakeholders and public involvement processes are included for your project. This plan also serves as a reference moving forward, should the need arise to review any of the outreach efforts determined through the process.

Your PIP should include:

- A list of stakeholders involved in the project, or who would benefit from understanding the purpose and impacts of the project.
- The type of outreach efforts, both in person and visual, to be used throughout the project.
- The frequency and timing of each type of effort and who is responsible for coordinating these efforts.

Larger projects, such as a master plan update or major runway reconstruction, may require a more extensive PIP to be shared with project stakeholders. Small projects—such as crack sealing a taxiway—may allow for the PIP to be discussed informally at a project scoping meeting and implemented through communication to stakeholders.

Ultimately, one of the first steps in developing a PIP is ensuring that the right stakeholders are getting the necessary information about each project.

2. Involve the right stakeholders

Airport sponsors and project champions want to ensure the right people are brought to the table for each project. That’s not to say everyone involved needs to agree with the project, but the pool of stakehold-

ers should be considered before moving forward. Outreach should look beyond the boundaries of the project. Always take time to ask, “Who isn’t at the table that needs to be?” Following are some common stakeholder groups to consider.

Airport tenants and users

- Pilots
- Based aircraft owners
- Hangar owners
- Flying clubs
- Airport businesses

Local government

- Zoning board members
- Airport board members
- County and city employees
- Maintenance staff
- Township board members

Off-airport stakeholders

- General public
- Area businesses
- Chambers of commerce
- Economic development authority
- Citizen committees
- Adjacent landowners

State and federal agencies

- FAA ADO
- MnDOT Office of Aeronautics
- FAA Flight Procedure
- Customs and border patrol
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- MN Department of Natural Resources
- FAA Part 139 inspectors

More participation can mean more conflict—and that’s okay! Successful engagement can reveal a diversity of opinions. Sometimes differences of opinion are subtle; other times they are highly divergent. Either way, the process of whittling down and making choices can expose conflict.

Engagement continued on page 2

This is common and expected. The public involvement process helps participants re-converge toward consensus as they make trade-offs, develop a shared framework, and balance vision. Guiding principles or shared values can help guide stakeholders to agreement or, at a minimum, consent.

The recently completed Duluth Sky Harbor Airport runway relocation project, which involved rotating, then building, a completely new 2,600-ft. runway in order to protect 27 acres of vulnerable forest and wildlife, began as a highly controversial project. The Duluth Airport Authority adopted a robust and transparent PIP that designed a process to provide meaningful engagement and build trust among stakeholders. Public and environmental agencies were able to provide input in the planning and environmental process and ultimately supported the final project and multiple years of construction.

3. Involve stakeholders early

Stakeholders want consistency and transparency. Today, with a world of knowledge at our fingertips, we're used to getting information instantly whenever and wherever we want it. Timely and accurate project updates communicated regularly not only make your communications more effective, but they also build trust.

Stakeholders feel empowered, and team collaboration is most effective, when stakeholders have a seat at the table. This can include committee involvement, personal visits with stakeholders, workshops, and other interactive tools for numerous stakeholders to participate. This ensures all stakeholder needs are met beyond the

physical location of the meeting while also providing important project and technical insight.

There is nothing more discouraging during a project than when the data has been gathered and analyzed and the alternatives vetted, but it's discovered that because the city council wasn't involved until the end of the process, local funding won't be available for two more years.

Each stakeholder's expertise brings a different vision to the project. This involvement can shed new light on a situation and help prevent conflicts before they happen. Waiting until the end of the project to involve stakeholders can lead to redoing certain aspects of a project or, worse, needing to start over.

4. Produce user-friendly documents

Aviation is a specialized field. While many people within the community are impacted by the airport through local funding, decision making, proximity to the airport, business use at the airport, or pilots coming to town for a meal, the ins and outs of the funding responsibilities, airspace requirements, and design standards are often not well known in the community. That's why it's important that documents be understood by both pilot and pedestrian. Consider the use of colors, symbols, and pictures to demonstrate a construction phasing plan or to show the type of aircraft using the local airport. Make sure the technical aspects or ideas from the project are communicated for all audiences, including the city council and the public.

5. Explore engagement tools

All project information can be brought together using multiple engagement tools. From meetings to publications, there are endless possibilities when it comes to communicating your airport information. Keep in mind the type of facilities and technology available to each audience; communication should be clear, concise, and effective.

Examples of engagement tools

- User-friendly construction phasing plans or construction notices
- Project committees and workgroups
- Meeting people where they are: pop-up meetings and events
- 1:1 meetings
- Newsletters
- Open houses
- Project information station
- Social media
- Project information kits
- Project website

Airports are hidden gems within our communities, providing a front door to new businesses, emergency medical access for all patients, agricultural assistance through crop spraying, and a place for the community to gather, among other things. Continue to find new ways to communicate with your community, tell the story of your airport, and build understanding, consensus, and support for this hidden gem!

—Melissa Underwood is a senior planner/project manager at SEH.

Airport cybersecurity: We want to hear from you!

Computer-based threats are growing in number and sophistication, and airports are increasingly at risk for cyberattacks. Results may include loss of confidential data, disrupted operations, and costly recoveries. If you have experience with cybersecurity issues or best practices at your airport, AirTAP wants to hear from you. We're interested in sharing suggestions, both large and small, for actions Minnesota airports can take to strengthen their cybersecurity and mitigate threats. Please take a few minutes to respond to this short survey by Feb. 1, 2021: <https://z.umn.edu/cybersecurity>.

Your responses will help us cover this topic in an upcoming issue of *Briefings*.

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An airport's story: Walker Municipal Airport

Walker Municipal Airport is located in northern Minnesota's Cass County about five miles north of downtown Walker.

City administrator/clerk-treasurer Hope Fairchild serves as the airport's manager, a responsibility she took on about six months ago. "Because Walker is so small (pop. 932), city staff members wear a lot of hats," Fairchild says. She deals mostly with the "big picture," working closely with consultant SEH on funding for airport projects and construction. The city's public works director and his staff of three handle all of the airport's maintenance, and the city's receptionist fields questions and handles hangar leasing in addition to reporting requirements, along with the deputy clerk.

The airport is used primarily by recreational fliers—mostly small single-engine and multi-engine aircraft. Area tourism and seasonal cabins along Leech Lake account for most general aviation aircraft users, she says.

According to Fairchild, 23 aircraft are

based at the airport: 20 single-engine aircraft, 2 multi-engine aircraft, and one helicopter. The airport sees approximately 9,300 operations per year, or 25 operations per day, with approximately 70 percent of the operations local and 30 percent transient GA.

Fairchild says she has no previous experience with airport management but has enjoyed learning the ins and outs. "It's always interesting," she says. When the US president visited Bemidji a few months ago, Fairchild received a request to submit a no-fly zone NOTAM. "I never thought I'd receive a phone call from the US Secret Service!"

Besides its ideal location for summer recreational traffic, the airport's other assets include an inviting A/D building to welcome visitors, and airside and landside facilities that are in excellent condition, she says. Perhaps the most significant challenge it faces is that current local funding is only from the City of Walker. "We would like to



explore additional funding from other local sources who use the airport," she says.

Fairchild says that the final review is being completed for the airport's 20-year master plan. Since the previous master plan was completed, the runway was extended from 2,803 to 3,220 feet, a parallel taxiway was constructed, the A/D building was completely redone, REILs were added to the runway, mowing equipment was purchased, and pavement maintenance was completed, she says. The next 20-year plan will cover a future runway extension to 3,500 feet, construction of additional and larger T-hangars, an apron expansion to accommodate more tie-down spaces, and additional box hangars for larger aircraft.

'Airports 101' hangar basics

The October 15 Airports 101 webinar on hangar fundamentals featured airport consultant Darren Christopher with RS&H, airport manager Quinten Anderson with Carlton County's Cloquet and Moose Lake airports, and Brian Conklin with the MnDOT Office of Aeronautics.

The two most common types of hangars at Minnesota's GA airports are T-hangars and box hangars. Anderson says he has more demand for T-hangar space, and both Cloquet and Moose Lake airports have a waiting list. His hangar lease rates are based on both MnDOT's fee schedule and other local airports' rates. Current rates are about 12 cents per sq. ft. for a T-hangar unit and 8 cents per sq. ft. for multi-plane storage units.

The Cloquet airport spends roughly \$2,000 a year on hangar maintenance; inspections are what Anderson devotes the most time to. For those, he has created his own checklist, but he noted there are others online. He's found that inspecting cables every two months is sufficient for identifying fraying or bad cables. He also looks for safety issues, such as hangar tenants storing hazardous materials or non-aeronautical items, such as campers or boats, in a hangar. "It's for aeronautical use, so we want to make sure it's used for that," he said.

When it comes to funding new hangar

construction, Christopher and Anderson encouraged airports to think creatively. Cloquet, for example, received a \$1.2 million grant from the US Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration to be used for hangar office space. Other options include FAA entitlements if a non-Part 139 airport's other airfield needs are met. Airports can also apply for a DEED grant under a new program that provides a 50-50 match up to \$250,000, Christopher said.

Finally, Minnesota's Hangar Loan Program provides loans for building hangar facilities, at up to 80 percent of the actual construction costs. Conklin noted that the program was established by law in 1957 to help meet growing aviation demand.

The hangar loan agreement obligates an airport to own and maintain the hangar for a minimum of 20 years and requires the hangar to be used for storing aircraft. The payback period of the no-interest loan is 20 years. To be eligible, the airport must be publicly owned, licensed, identified in the state system of airports, and properly zoned. The first step in applying for a loan is to include the hangar construction on the airport's Capital Improvement Plan. An airport sponsor must submit a request letter on city letterhead, officially signed and dated, along with

a simple drawing with basic dimensions and the intended aircraft storage layout. Along with this, the location needs to be shown on the approved airport layout plan. The request letter must include an estimated cost break out to include the cost of the building itself (including the engineering) and the cost of site prep.

Currently, the \$4 million for the program is fully committed, Conklin said. But an airport wanting to apply for a loan should still submit a request. "Then we can show the legislature that we have all this demand but not enough money," he said. "So we can make the case that we need more money for the hangar loan fund."

More information

- MnDOT Hangar Loan Program website (<https://www.dot.state.mn.us/aero/airportdevelopment/fundingandgrants.html#hangar>)
- Hangar Loan Program fact sheet; Carlton County airport hangar inspection checklist and lease agreement (<http://airtap.umn.edu/publications/briefings/2021/01/hangar>)
- WisDOT hangar lease template (<https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/doing-bus/aeronautics/resources/arpt-ops.aspx>)

MnDOT Aeronautics update

Like many organizations, the MnDOT Aeronautics office has chosen to serve its customers remotely during the pandemic. While the office is closed, MnDOT Aeronautics staff can be reached via email or by phone (<https://www.dot.state.mn.us/aero/contacts.html>). The office anticipates remaining closed through the spring of 2021.

Staffing

The Office of Aeronautics has had several role changes and welcomed new staff members over the past few months:

- Ryan Gaug was promoted to assistant director in May of this year following Kathy Vesely's retirement.
- Rylan Juran was promoted to planning director to replace Gaug.
- Josh Root of MnDOT's Chief Counsel's office is serving in a temporary role overseeing Navigation Systems, Air Transportation, and Aviation Safety & Enforcement.
- Luke Bourassa started in April as the south region engineer in Airport Development.
- Tim Jarvis started in May as an aviation

representative working in Aviation Safety & Enforcement.

- Mina Carlson started in July as a heliport program administrator working in Aviation Safety & Enforcement.
- Cheri Gagne started in October as a program manager working with Unmanned Aircraft Systems.

CARES Act grant update

In March, Congress passed H.R. 748, Public Law 116-136, to provide funds to eligible NPIAS airports to address the financial impact of COVID-19. Eligibility requirements for CARES operation grants can be found on the FAA's website (https://www.faa.gov/airports/cares_act/). Note that these requirements differ from state Maintenance & Operations grants. Participating airports should review the rules prior to submitting a credit application to avoid any delays in reimbursement. NPIAS airports should continue to send credit applications through regional MnDOT staff following the CARES Act Credit Application Process ([dot.state.mn.us/aero/airportdevelopment/fundingandgrants.html#cares-act](https://www.dot.state.mn.us/aero/airportdevelopment/fundingandgrants.html#cares-act)).

Reminder: Airports should add any state-only grant requests for fiscal year 2022 to their CIP by January 31, 2021. Please reach out to your regional engineer with any questions.

AirTAP & MnDOT 2021 webinar series

This year's Minnesota Airports Conference, previously scheduled for April 2021, has been canceled due to ongoing uncertainty related to COVID-19.

To continue providing you with informational and educational opportunities during this time, AirTAP and MnDOT Aeronautics are launching a new webinar series starting in late winter 2021 and running through the spring. And it will all be free!

We'll send out more information on webinar dates, times, and topics as the series develops. Details will also be posted on the AirTAP website: airtap.umn.edu/events.

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