

HAI SURVEY OF OPERATING PERFORMANCE

Brandon M. Battles
Bell Helicopter Textron, Inc.

The Helicopter Association International undertook the Survey of Operating Performance in 1990 to provide information to its members, manufacturers, and others closely associated with the helicopter industry. The HAI Economics Committee, with input from the HAI leadership and professional staff, developed the survey instrument.

HAI mailed the survey to 430 of its members and over 2,000 nonmembers in the United States in September, 1990. A total of 99 usable responses, 36 of them from HAI members, were entered into the data base.

The respondents represented three major types of operation: commercial, corporate, and public service. The largest number of respondents (61 percent) were commercial operators, with revenues from a wide variety of activities and sources. Corporate flight departments accounted for 29 percent of the survey forms received. For the most part, corporate flight departments flew helicopters that were not for hire, and the corporation was the sole source of operating income. Public service operations for the remaining 10 percent of the responses. The normal source of revenue was from state and local governments or medical service.

A copy of the survey report was included in the background papers for this workshop. I invite you to refer to it for basic information about your segment of the helicopter transportation industry during the forthcoming working group discussions.

With this as background, I would now like to offer a few observations about the purpose of the survey and our plans for the future.

At the time you first decided to establish a helicopter operation, whether it was for profit or to serve a government agency or private corporation, you probably asked yourself questions such as these. How do I reach the objective? How much will it cost? What problems have others encountered?

Hopefully, you also asked how to measure progress toward your objective.

There are different ways. You can compare actual expenses to budgets, monitor customer feedback, or compare your operation to others in the industry. Comparing your operation to others in the industry is the concept we focused on with the survey of economics and operating performance. With the survey, we simply tried to give you another measure, another way to

compare your operation to others of similar size and type.

One of the main hurdles that confronted us before we mailed the survey was to ensure that responses remained confidential. Several operators expressed a concern that, if they responded to the survey, their financial and operating information would become public knowledge and competitors would gain proprietary information.

We concluded that confidentiality could best be protected by having an independent organization collect, compile the responses, and group them in categories of size and type of activity that are sufficiently large to preserve anonymity.

We plan to repeat the survey with the intent of enlarging the data base to give a better picture of the industry as a whole and to keep the information current. Three points will be crucial to our success.

First, we must receive feedback on the first survey. You, the operators, determine the survey's level of success. You can help us construct a questionnaire that is meaningful to you and our industry and fits your needs and concerns.

Second, participants must complete the entire questionnaire. Answer all questions relevant to your organization. What may seem ridiculous to you may be very important to others in the industry. For example, the insurance industry may rely on information we gather to elevate their understanding of helicopter operations. Commercial operators may find it easier to work with financial institutions if they have comparable information about operations of similar size and type. Uninformed operators may improve their understanding of helicopter operations and helicopter transportation as a business.

Greater participation is the third and final key to success of the second survey. With the first survey we had about an eight percent return. With the successful completion of one survey, operator apprehension should diminish, and participation should increase. With a higher level of participation more reliance can be placed on the results.

I would like to issue you a challenge. An association in the electronics industry with approximately 860 members conducted a similar survey for its members.

Over 97 percent of the association members responded! Quite a response rate, and a nice goal for our industry to aim for.

In closing, I simply want to ask you to help us help you. Let the Economic Committee give you another tool to help you measure your progress on the road to success.