

Preparing the Next Generation of Airport Leaders

On a Sunday evening in February 2013, 20 airport professionals from Florida gathered in Tampa for the inaugural session of Florida's Airport Leadership Development Program—an exciting new education initiative built upon the research and curricula contained in *ACRP Report 75: Airport Leadership Development Program*.

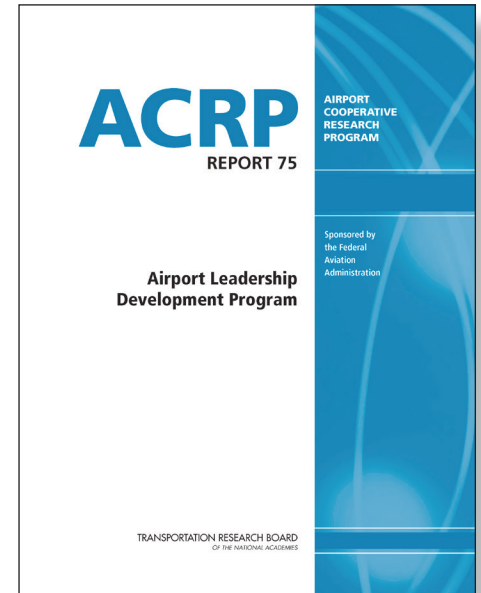
The successful program, now in its fourth year, is a collaborative effort between the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Aviation and Spaceports Office, the Florida Airports Council (FAC), the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) at the University of South Florida, and Direct Effect Solutions. FDOT supports the program financially, while the FAC is responsible for its promotion. Michael Audino from CUTR, working with subcontractor Mindy Price from Direct Effect Solutions, facilitates the training course. Audino chaired the *ACRP Report 75* project panel that oversaw the research, and Price co-authored the report's training curriculum.

In addition to documenting the need for programs to develop future airport leaders, *ACRP Report 75* finds that the current gap in leadership development

is in part because of affordability and availability of pertinent courses. The report's findings also indicate that the leadership skills needed at airports are needed also in other industries, but the circumstances in which airport leaders apply the skills are unique.

"According to the research, most airport leaders receive some supervisory training to meet mandatory technical requirements. But after that, there may be limited or even no additional leadership-specific courses," says Bill Johnson, former executive director of the FAC. "Further, the report found that existing and emerging leaders aren't learning the skills needed to lead an organization as complex as an airport."

The 3½ day training and education program provides participants greater knowledge and skills they can apply immediately to circumstances at their airport, and helps participants acquire tools and techniques to focus energy on leadership appropriate to the immediate needs in their current airport environments. The program also helps participants expand their self-awareness and design a developmental roadmap to guide their leadership journey.



Since its inception, 150 professionals from 40 different Florida airports have completed the program. To date, 16 Florida airports have sent three or more representatives to the class and six Florida airports have seven or more graduates. The impact of the training is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that 33 of the graduates have moved their careers forward either through a promotion or by accepting a new position.

According to Aaron Smith, state aviation manager for FDOT, many airport leaders and most future airport leaders need this training. "We reviewed *ACRP Report 75* and agreed with their conclusion—today's airport leaders are lacking [programs designed to teach] effective leadership skills, and the training and education received by these airport leaders is not current to the needs for leading the dynamically changing airport environments of today."

Course participants begin their leadership training journey several weeks prior to



Above: Inaugural class of Florida's Airport Leadership Development Program, a collaborative education initiative built upon the research and curricula contained in *ACRP Report 75*. Front row (left to right): Erik Treudt, Cyrus Callum, Cynthia Barrow, Bill Johnson, Debra Lemke, Clara Bennett, Nina Demeo, Terry Lloyd, Tom Jewsbury, Michael Stewart, and Mindy Price. Back row (left to right): Alan Penska, Brian Hunter, Andy Wilson, James Parrish, Jeff Bunting, Ted Soliday, George Stokus, Richard Cloutier, and Michael Audino.

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Since 2006, an industry-driven, applied research program that develops near-term, practical solutions to problems faced by airport operators.

the first day of class. Each participant must complete a “360 degree” assessment instrument before they arrive on the USF campus. Course facilitator Mindy Price calls this the “ticket for admission.” The 360 assessment requires participants to capture input from their organizational peers, organizational subordinates, and a small group of individuals who hold higher positions within the participant’s organizational structure. These audiences provide a “360 degree” view of perceptions of leadership behaviors in the current environment that the participants can compare against their own ratings. The insights afforded by the 360 assessment helps participants focus on specific leadership topics during the training.

The first full day of training focuses on self-management and leadership fundamentals. Participants learn about and begin to formulate their personal leadership “brand.” Participants discuss various leadership styles, their personal leadership journey, leadership passages, and “followership”—a concept new to many participants. This first day includes increasing awareness of participant’s communication and conflict style that are demonstrated in their day-to-day behaviors at work. The topic of “generational differences” is also discussed, as we now have five generations working side-by-side in the workforce.

During the second day of training, participants focus on leadership engagement and competencies and address relationship building, motivating employees, performance management, critical thinking, decision making, building a business case, and negotiation topics. On the final day, participants concentrate on leadership application and focus on developing culture, strategy execution, and change management.

Throughout the 3½ days, participants have an opportunity to apply what they have learned through four “assessment centers.” Each of the assessment centers creates an opportunity for class facilitators to observe whether key learning objectives need to be reinforced or reviewed based on the participant’s ability to deliver. The four assessment centers are:

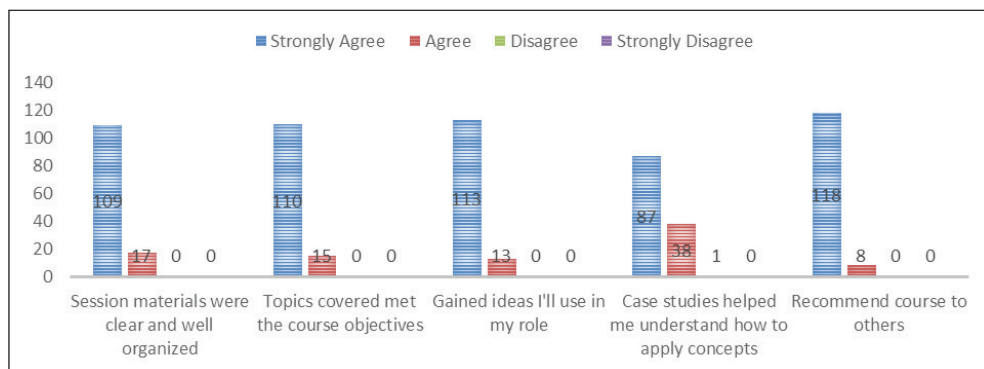
- Conflict Management,
- Performance Management,
- Negotiation, and
- Culminating Commitments to Change.

The culminating assessment center activity provides participants the opportunity to compile what they’ve learned throughout the course and create a personal leadership development roadmap, which participants present to their fellow classmates. The quality of the curriculum and the facilitators is graphically demonstrated in the bar chart below, which reveals more

“The Airport Leadership Development class was by far one of the best leadership training classes that I’ve had the privilege to attend. Highly qualified facilitators with professional aviation experience provided real-life applications that pertain to day-to-day leadership practices and principles within the airport industry. I highly recommend this class to my fellow airport colleagues and peers.”

—Tom Jewsbury, St. Petersburg / Clearwater International Airport

than 93% of graduates would recommend this course to their colleagues and peers.



Above: Survey data (through March 2016) from graduates of Florida’s Airport Leadership Development Program, which was developed using the research and curricula presented in ACRP Report 75. The bar chart on the far right shows that more than 93% of graduates would recommend the training course to others.

Michael Stewart, director of Governmental Affairs for the Jacksonville Aviation Authority and former president of the FAC is committed to making the ACRP-produced curriculum sustainable on a long-term basis. “It can have such an impact on developing future leadership,” he explains. “There is a lot of good young talent out there, but they need opportunities presented to them that will help them reach the next step on their career ladder. This course focuses on helping them define a direction instead of just grabbing the next job that may come along.”

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