



FlightPlan, the collaborative research project to document the status and explore the future of mission aviation, was launched by representatives of the mission aviation stakeholder community at a late-2003 consultation in Colorado Springs. The 2004-2007 study consisted of three phases:

1. describing the history and status of mission aviation;
2. exploring perceptions, needs, opportunities and challenges; and
3. exploring the future of mission aviation.

The Landscape of Mission Aviation

Mission aviation has a rich and exciting history. Its roots, starting more than 50 years ago, infused the ministry with a “jungle pilot” image and mystique. As the church around the world developed during the past half century, so did mission aviation, responding to emerging needs and opportunities.

Today, mission aviation is a broad and diverse ministry. FlightPlan identified 125 distinct, international and/or cross-cultural mission aviation programs. There are the traditional missionary-pilots who use aviation to reach their remote places of ministry. Numerous pioneering mission agencies operate aviation programs to support their field ministries. Some groups are focused on providing air transport to other mission agencies. Others primarily provide humanitarian and relief flights. In addition to these larger programs, there are volunteer pilots who routinely take a break from their daily lives to ferry packages and short-term missionaries. Also, business-as-mission aviation programs are springing up, along with numerous other innovative forms of aviation ministry.

Supporting this well-developed industry are more than 35 dedicated mission aviation training programs: from bachelor and associate degree programs at Christian colleges, to specialized certification and experience-building programs. In addition, key associations, networks and partnerships have formed to support the growing financial, equipment, training and safety requirements of mission aviation.

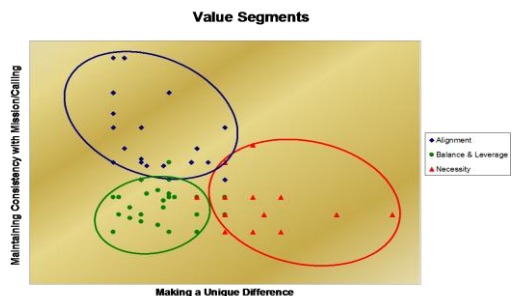
The global need for mission aviation is undiminished. Rural populations are growing rather than declining, and most rural peoples are not increasing their mobility. Hundreds of millions of people lack access to an all-weather road. Physical access remains a leading challenge for missions focused on remote peoples. And, remote peoples are unlikely to be reached by trickle-down from urban-oriented strategies.

Mission aviation serves within a context of pervasive global trends, including: globalization, the communications revolution, the AIDS pandemic, urbanization, the rise of Asia's prominence, the prospect of global recession, government corruption, terrorism and war, and growing anti-American sentiment. In addition, significant missiological, political, financial, technological and personnel trends are directly impacting mission aviation today. A few examples include:

- shifting missiological focus and donor interest toward transformation rather than unreached peoples, toward business-as-mission, and toward the 10/40 Window (dominated by such countries as China, India and the Muslim World) which tends to restrict aviation more than the earlier focus on Latin America and Africa;
- growing scarcity and spiking cost of the avgas required by traditional piston-engine aircraft, and development of Quest's Kodiak aircraft;
- declining numbers of pilot/mechanic trainees, exacerbated by the high number of graduates who fail to make it to the field and the declining tenure of field missionaries;
- the growth of volunteer and second-career pilots who make themselves and sometimes their planes available short-term; and
- the development of GPS and key communications technologies.

The recent convergence of these and other changes in the context of international mission aviation ministry require reflection, assessment and fresh thinking on the part of the mission aviation stakeholder community. Program innovation, however, can be challenging at times for an industry built on – some would say dependent on – safety, standards and stability. But key leaders are committed to responding in dynamic and innovative ways to pursue enhanced relevance and effectiveness.

During the FlightPlan research process, mission aviation “outsiders” (those doing cross-cultural mission around the world, the potential users of mission aviation services) were surveyed regarding a variety of attitudes and behaviors related to mission aviation.



Similarly, mission aviation “insiders” (service providers, trainers, users and donors) expressed a variety of perspectives as they reflected on the status and future of mission aviation, including:

- values they feel ought to drive mission aviation;
- concerns they have for the future of mission aviation;
- opportunities they see for the future of mission aviation; and
- needs they see in terms of resources, policies and practices required to make the most of the emerging opportunities.

Exploring the Future of Mission Aviation

Models, or scenarios, can be useful tools to help an industry explore possibilities for effective and innovative future service. During the FlightPlan study, input from the mission aviation stakeholder community led to a set of seven models for future aviation ministry. These models were described and evaluated by mission leaders to explore implications for existing and potential aviation programs.

The models, each developed over several pages in the FlightPlan Research Report, can be summarized as follows (in no particular order):

- The Agile Provider offers flexible ministry focused on meeting constantly changing needs;
- The Nation Developer helps build transportation and communications infrastructure in the developing world;
- The Field Opener develops air access in remote areas for pioneer missionaries;
- The Tribal Advocate assists tribal peoples in their development and application of technologies;
- The Microaviator represents individuals and churches who use aviation as personal transportation;
- The Business Creator uses business-as-mission strategies to establish commerce in less-reached areas; and
- The Resource Broker obtains, enhances and deploys aviation resources as they become available.

FlightPlan also identified a set of four models dealing explicitly with the training of mission aviators:

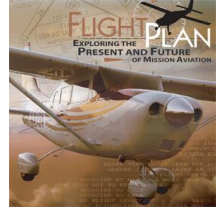
- The Multi-dimensional Educator trains aviators in a wider educational context with various career options;
- The Vertically Integrated Training System ties the student’s training into a commitment with a sending agency;
- The Situational Training Specialist focuses on providing specialized training required by specific agencies; and
- The Globally Distributed Trainer fills the critical need for trained aviators in the developing world.

The research process concluded with suggestions for how mission aviation service providers, trainers, users and donors might benefit from applying the research results within their specific ministry planning contexts.

FlightPlan CD-ROM

The research project resulted in a FlightPlan CD-ROM designed to assist the mission aviation community as it moves into the future. The CD-ROM contains over 350 MB of resources, including:

- the 184-page FlightPlan Research Report;
- a 7-page executive summary;
- PowerPoint presentations of the research report and summary;
- key documents describing the world of mission aviation, from leaders and researchers in the field;
- key measures describing general aviation and mission aviation;
- a directory of 171 mission aviation-related organizations;
- a 90-page annotated web directory of links to aviation websites; and
- a 2,510-page document library containing over 300 documents related to mission aviation, provided by the stakeholder community.



The FlightPlan CD-ROM is being made available to qualified individuals involved in mission aviation. To request a copy, contact GMI (flightplan@gmi.org).

FlightPlan was led by the research team at Global Mapping International (GMI). The mission of GMI is to produce and present world-class research that fuels emerging mission movements and leaders. The non-profit ministry, founded in 1983, focuses on three areas of service to evangelical mission leaders around the world:

- providing research services and research training;
- publishing research and information resources; and
- providing geographic mapping resources and services.

For more information about FlightPlan, please contact GMI.

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