



## **Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission**

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **Commission Approves Grant for CareerTech Program Aimed at Addressing Aerospace Worker Shortage**

**OKLAHOMA CITY** – A program designed by the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education to help grow Oklahoma’s burgeoning aerospace industry is getting a financial boost from the Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission.

Commissioners recently approved a \$50,000 grant to help fund the Aerospace Industry Recruitment (AIR) Partnership. The program is a collaborative effort among the state’s education, industry and government leaders to recruit, train and retain skilled workers for the aerospace industry.

“This grant will make a huge difference in promoting the AIR Partnership throughout the state,” Commission Director Victor Bird said. “Right now, we have a shortage of qualified, skilled workers in the Oklahoma aerospace industry, one of our state’s largest employers. And already we are seeing some positive results from the establishment of this program.”

CareerTech teamed with the Aeronautics Commission, Oklahoma Department of Commerce and individual career technology centers around the state to develop the AIR Partnership in response to the aerospace worker shortage.

Phil Berkenbile, state director for CareerTech, thanked the Aeronautics Commission for its support of the program.

“The leadership and resources provided by the Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission have helped us position the CareerTech system and our partners to implement new and innovative approaches for serving this vital economic engine. The growing successes of the AIR initiative are a result of our agencies partnering to provide feet on the ground and purposeful leadership to education, industry and government,” Berkenbile said.

Students enrolled in AIR are hired as interns by participating companies. The interns are then paired with a skilled veteran from within the company. Next, the skills and performance levels the students need to have in order to become productive members of the company are identified. A formal training program is then created to target those specific skills.

Aerospace companies, in essence, “try before they buy” when hiring new employees who have gone through the AIR program. This helps keep the companies competitive and, at the same time, improves employees’ chances of remaining with the company on a more permanent basis.

“What we are doing through the AIR Partnership is connecting mentorships into companies where the training is a guided transition into the industry,” said H.L. Baird, CareerTech’s aviation program supervisor. “So for Oklahomans, it provides a way to get your foot in the door. For Oklahoma aerospace companies, it provides a place to recruit skilled workers.”

As a result of the AIR Partnership, a total of 40 sheet metal mentorships and 20 airframe and power plant mechanics mentorships with Oklahoma aerospace companies have now been established. A Web site has also been developed that Baird and program partners hope will become a place where both aerospace companies and Oklahomans looking for work in the industry can make a connection.

“We can do so much more than just facilitate internships and mentorships,” Baird said. “What we found out is that we could actually help in recruiting for aerospace companies.”

Baird said the next step is to get the more aerospace companies committed to the AIR Partnership and begin participating in the program.

“We’re trying to mature the partnership to the point where companies will step in and participate with additional funding,” he said.

According to various economic reports, Oklahoma’s aerospace industry is one of the state’s largest employers, resulting in approximately 150,000 direct, indirect and induced jobs statewide. The industry yields an annual industrial output of \$12.5 billion and generates an annual payroll of \$5 billion.

Baird said that one in 10 Oklahomans derive their income from the aerospace/aviation industry with an average salary of nearly \$55,000 compared to \$29,000 for all Oklahomans. He noted that Oklahoma is one of seven centers in the world for the modification, maintenance, repair and overhaul of aircraft.

“Among the more than 400 aerospace companies in Oklahoma, we have one of the highest concentrations of companies and skilled workers in the world who are engaged in the MRO of aircraft,” he said. “Jobs in Oklahoma’s aerospace industry are good jobs, too. They are the kind of jobs that keep our best and brightest here and attract other talented workers from out of state.”

To learn more about the AIR Partnership as well as mentorships currently available within the aerospace industry, please visit the program's Web site at [www.airpartnership.org](http://www.airpartnership.org).

The Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission's mission is to promote aviation, which includes fostering the growth of the aerospace industry and ensuring that the needs of commerce and communities across Oklahoma are met by the state's 114 public airports, which comprise the state’s air transportation system.