

# FAA Launches Exploratory Drone Integration Pilot Program with State and Local Governments

A new federal program will allow willing communities to serve as guinea pigs for futuristic drone operations.

President Trump signed a presidential memorandum in October, directing the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to create a program to encourage innovative uses of unmanned aerial systems (UAS, more commonly known as “drones”). That program permits state and local governments to determine which drone activities may occur within their specific jurisdictions. If the state or local government’s proposed operations are approved by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), then the jurisdiction (which could be as large as an entire state) will become a “drone innovation zone.”

A drone innovation zone could permit activities such as flights over people and flights that take place at night. They could also include utilizing a drone beyond the

pilot’s visual line of sight, flying it as high as 400 feet above ground level, and using it for package delivery.

State, local or tribal governments that want to create an innovation zone are considered the “lead applicant” in the program and were required to submit a letter of their intent to participate in the program to the FAA by November 28, 2017. Lead applicants who met the November 28 deadline are required to complete a full application to be considered by the FAA. The first portion of the application was due on December 13, 2017, and the second portion is due on January 4, 2018.

Other interested parties, which include public and private sector entities, were required to submit their interest in participating with a lead applicant no later than December 13, 2017. As of December 8, 2017, the FAA received notice from 2,374 public and private entities that they are interested in participating in the program.

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Proposals from state and local governments will be evaluated on multiple factors, including:

- the overall economic impact of the proposal
- the jurisdiction’s commitment to safety concerns
- involvement of local communities affected and their support of the proposal
- diversity of the operations to be conducted in the jurisdiction
- involvement of commercial entities in the proposal

The DOT must accept at least five proposals by May 7, 2018, but it is not limited in the number of proposals it may select. State and local governments chosen to participate will be required to enter into agreements with the DOT regarding their drone innovation zone.

Although the deadlines for initial program participants have passed, the FAA will continue to accept proposals to join the program for up to one year before the program is set to end. ■



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