

# New England Aerobatic Club – IAC Chapter 35

## Strategic Planning

### Executive Summary

In August 2023, on the eve of our 50-year anniversary, our Board gave approval to undertake a strategic planning effort for the New England Aerobatic Club. This effort was intended to help us assess the current state of the Club, develop consensus around our shared purpose and vision going forward, and to identify initiatives to guide the work and efforts of our Club leadership, Board, and Members. This document presents the work of our team and identifies strategic initiatives for the Club.

#### **Approach and Learnings Gained**

Our approach was to assemble a core planning team, survey and talk with Club members, consider the environment in which we operate, and realistically evaluate strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the Club. Over 80% of Club members responded to the survey. We also spoke, or conducted follow-up conversations, with about half our members.

We found enthusiasm and strong support for the Club purpose. We conducted a realistic assessment of member and club information, considered trends in aerobatics, general aviation, and more broadly in current society. We held a planning retreat on December 9<sup>th</sup> to consider what we learned and develop a five-year vision for the Club. In doing so, we identified themes and strategic priorities and initiatives to guide us.

#### **Strategic Initiatives**

Following are six strategic initiatives identified in our December 9<sup>th</sup> strategic planning retreat. These are listed below. Many are inter-related and all of the initiatives are intended to work together to help us achieve our vision for the next five years.

1. Communications and Branding
2. Outreach and Recruitment
3. Training and Development of Club Members and Volunteers
4. Chapter Gatherings
5. Modernizing Organizational Processes and Governance
6. Encourage Entry into Aerobatics

The following pages summarize what we learned and present the vision and strategic initiatives.

#### **Member Feedback and Next Steps**

Our next step is to gain feedback on this document and the proposed initiatives. We then will present this to the Board for approval, which we hope to do in February or March. We look forward to further engaging Club members and enlisting support and help in implementing initiatives through our Club activities.

We would like to thank our planning team and all who participated in our survey and interview process.

## **Background, Objective of Strategic Planning, and Planning Team**

The New England Aerobatic Club, IAC Chapter 35 (NEAC, the Club) was founded in 1974 to promote and sustain the sport of aerobatics, education, and aerobatic competition in our region. During the past 49 years Club members have helped sustain regular aerobatic practice, run successful competition events, advanced the sharing of knowledge, and created long-standing social relationships for pilots and volunteers. The Club now faces challenges in recruiting, including an aging base of active members, a graying of the GA pilot community, changing demographics, and competition for recreational attention. The Club is also now in a time of new communication styles, new opportunities, and new methods that could be available to us.

The objective of this strategic planning effort was to engage our members and establish a shared vision, strategy, and plan to guide the efforts of our volunteer organization over the coming five years and beyond. Undertaking this effort enabled us to engage current and potential members, identify and strengthen shared values, generate energy and enthusiasm, help develop future leaders, and establish tangible initiatives and objectives to guide NEAC activities and sustain its mission and future direction.

Our planning session team consisted of:

- Sheldon Apsell
- Clint Davies
- Greg Dinning
- Steve Fiegel
- Ray Fuller
- Jay Hewett
- Phil Joseph
- Phil Palmer
- Paul Russo

## **SWOT Analysis**

*Following is a high-level summary of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the Club:*

### **Strengths**

- Practice sessions
- Active members
- Educational opportunities
- GMAC Contest and Keene Fall Classic
- Aerobatic experience and talent in New England
- Five long term aerobatic practice areas in NH and ME
- Members with relevant skills and interest in sharing

### **Weaknesses**

- For some, our events are too far away
- Website hosting has been unreliable
- The Club does not maintain a regular newsletter
- It is difficult for some to find and access the Club
- A perception the club is not inclusive

### **Threats**

- Aging demographic of members
- Competition for attention and changing interests
- Aerobatic aircraft are expensive and not readily available for new members
- Participation and engagement is difficult for volunteer organization
- Weather in New England
- Access to resources for support, coaching, and training is difficult

### **Opportunities**

- Present an open and inclusive posture
- Establish more opportunities for non-pilots
- Connect with EAA Chapters
- Make it easier to apply for FAA waived aerobatic practice areas
- Publish a regular communication to members and the interested GA community
- Do more with social media
- Promote our brand
- Design a specific focus for each practice and gathering
- Encourage non-competition oriented aerobatic activities
- Develop member skills and culture of mentoring
- Inform entry into aerobatic partnerships
- Maintain a member roster with photographs
- Create more Fun!

## **2028 Vision and themes identified during our December 9th Planning Retreat**

*The context for developing our vision and informing the direction of our planning was, “where will the Club be in the year 2028” (5 years in the future). This led to the following descriptions and themes:*

**IAC 35 Members and Pilots** – We are perceived as highly competent, professional, and skilled aviators and enthusiasts. Welcoming to interested people, our pilots and volunteers are well regarded across the aerobatic and aviation community. Our New England Aerobatic Club stands out for our development of people, as a leader among IAC chapters, and for growing successful well-ranked pilots at regional and national levels.

**Helping Members Develop and Succeed in all Aspects** – Encompasses Teaching, Mentoring, Coaching, Competition, and Individual Achievement. Includes improving flying skills and results (includes increasing average scores), learning from experienced and skilled instructors and competition pilots.

**Doing More with Club Practice Sessions** – Leveraging practice sessions to focus on teaching, developing, and coaching both flying and judging skills. Our practice sessions, conducted across New England and in collaboration with other Northeast Chapters, are also invitations to educate, inspire, and encourage people about well-rounded aviation skills, as well as recruit new members into flying and non-flying roles. We are pro-active and adaptable in dealing with the weather in New England.

**Growing membership with increasing diversity** – We have 60 to 100 members in 2028 with an increasing diversity of people. There is strong camaraderie and community around our common interest and enjoyment of sport aerobatics. We host open and inclusive gatherings, practice sessions, banquets, and other events. Our shared values include the trust, mutual respect, and support of best friends with common interests. There is a strong sense of belonging and fun!

**Outreach, Recruitment and Branding** – We are making it easier to get into aerobatics. We have grown our outreach to the general aviation and EAA communities, becoming more accessible to enthusiasts and people interested in learning about aerobatics. We have grown our volunteer ranks and helped to inspire people to form airplane clubs and partnerships. We communicate and promote our club brand on our website, social media, and through individual efforts. Our sponsor relationships further help to promote our visibility and contribute to Club revenue.

**Developing great judges** – We consistently develop judges, including delivering annual judge training, and provide judge coaching and development at practice sessions. We leverage data to help advance and sustain quality and consistency.

**Maturing Club Processes** – We have strengthened and standardized Club operating, business, and governance processes. Includes leveraging cloud technology and applications as tools for planning, information management and document storage in a reliable and efficient manner.

## **NEAC Strategic Planning Initiatives**

*Below are the strategic initiatives identified in our December 9<sup>th</sup> strategic planning retreat:*

1. Communications and Branding
2. Outreach and Recruitment
3. Training and Development of Club Members and Volunteers
4. Chapter Gatherings
5. Modernize Organizational, Management, and Governance Processes
6. Encourage Entry into Aerobatics

Once approved by the Board, we will work to advance these initiatives in all our operations and activities as appropriate. We will report on progress periodically throughout each season and at our annual member meeting. We will also assess and make updates to initiatives as warranted each year in our annual planning.