

Introduction: Goals for Strategic Planning of DFW Airport Special Events

NOTE: The following scenario is fictitious and was developed to illustrate the need to establish a clear strategic vision for future special events hosted by DFW.

It's late afternoon on the Friday before a holiday weekend. Keys are jingling and goodbyes are being exchanged amid talk of backyard barbecues, road trips, and in-laws. Then the fax machine in DFW's Public Affairs office sputters to life and cranks out a press release. Every senior staff member's Blackberry vibrates with a duplicate announcement. In short order, an aide from Sen. Hutchison's office calls to discuss the news. Dallas-Ft. Worth has been selected as one of four possible sites for the newly established U.S.-China Clean Energy Research Center, to which the two nations have jointly pledged \$15 million dollars in startup funds.

With apologies for the short notice, Sen. Hutchison's office would like you to accommodate a small, "low key" delegation from the U.S. Department of Energy and the Chinese embassy next Thursday afternoon. This site-selection advance team for the newly established research center will be led by U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu. The Beijing dignitaries will include Minister of Science Wan Gang, Administrator of National Energy Administration Zhang Guo Bao, and their staff and translators. A handful of leading American and Chinese scientists and engineers will accompany them, and Mayors Moncrief and Leppert are expected to make an appearance. The Beijing delegation is especially interested in DFW's sustainability initiative. Sen. Hutchinson's aide promises the group will be on-airport for only a few hours and that the visit will not be publicized.

What happens next? This impromptu stopover raises a raft of questions:

- Who is in charge of this event—the Executive VP of Ops, since the delegation has requested a sustainability tour? The VP of Environmental Affairs? The Executive VP of Governmental and Stakeholder Affairs? Which other departments need to participate and in what ways?

- How does this event rank among the airport's priorities? Is it of negligible importance because the proposed research center has no connection with the airport? Or should it be given precedence because of the VIPs and the potential for regional advancement?
- How will the myriad details of protocol, security, transportation, and hospitality be handled? What kind of reception or presentation should be given?
- Whose budget will pay for the visit, and how much should be allocated?
- Most important, who's going to miss the weenie roast this weekend to get a jump on all this?

As this scenario illustrates, DFW International Airport is host to special events ranging from the straightforward and predictable—tours, games, tournaments, and the like—to the spontaneous and pivotal. Of course, we've organized events of every conceivable description without any written game plan—essentially, we've been winging it, relying on experience, precedent, and a dash of improvisation to see us through.

Regardless of how successfully we've carried it off, this ad-lib approach is, at best, inefficient and reactive. It's not in keeping with the dynamic DFW brand, nor does it support the airport's strategic vision. Instead of following a proven, well-rehearsed formula, we rehash the steps from start to finish nearly every time we organize an event. Faced with an unanticipated request to prepare for an occasion like the U.S.-China advance team's visit, departments must scramble to figure out what needs to be done, who's doing it, when each step needs to happen, and what the fallout might be if the arrangements fail to meet stakeholders' expectations. Of course, paying for the whole affair becomes an afterthought in the hustle just to pull off the event in time and without any diplomatic faux pas or other gaffes.

In lieu of this shoot-from-the-hip approach, DFW has decided to take its cue from Winston Churchill, who advised, "Let your advance worrying become advance

thinking and planning.” We intend to augment our readiness for special events at all levels by spearheading the creation of a novel framework that categorizes events according to type and impact and delineates planning procedures for each category. Our goals in drafting this forward-looking special events blueprint are outlined below:

- Safeguard passengers and mitigate the risk of disrupting airport operations
- Achieve greater consistency and strive for continual innovation in our execution of special events
- Establish and adhere to realistic budgets
- Capitalize on opportunities for regional development
- Raise DFW’s national and international profile as a premier multimodal transportation gateway

With meticulous planning and communication, collaboration, and coordination (C³) at all levels, we can ensure that each special event will reinforce DFW’s position at the vanguard of domestic and international air travel. Determining in advance how to handle various kinds of events at each stage—preparation, execution, and debriefing—will boost the likelihood that our plans will unfold smoothly and minimize discord when unforeseen circumstances do arise.

Definition and Categories by Type

Before we go further we must define, for our purposes, what constitutes a special event:

A planned special event is an internal or external activity of a predetermined duration that takes place at a scheduled time and location and may impact regular operations at DFW due to increased air and ground travel demand.

Special events are either recurring, such as sporting events and annual conventions, or discrete occasions on the order of AAAE. Groundbreaking ceremonies, VIP visits, and the like are also considered discrete because the

circumstances vary widely each time such an event occurs. The 2011 Super Bowl, of course, is in a class of its own. Special events may take place on-airport (internal) or may be coordinated with regional activities (external). The categories of special events, with examples of each, are as follows:

Recurring events

- Most frequently requested DFW tours
 - Airfield
 - Terminal D
 - AOC/EOC
 - Fire training site
 - USO/Terminal D
 - FAA Tracon facility
 - Sustainability tour
- Sporting events
 - Byron Nelson and Colonial Golf Tournaments
 - Texas Motor Speedway Race
 - NBA All-Star Game
- Seasonal initiatives
 - Holiday Helper
- Annual conventions
 - Mary Kay

Discrete events

- Airport functional events and charity fundraisers
 - Special Olympics Plane Pull
 - USO "Welcome Home a Hero"
 - Groundbreaking or dedication ceremonies, such as those for Terminal D, Founders Plaza, and the perimeter taxiway
 - United Way "Run the Runway" 5K race to inaugurate the east runway
- Rollout of new air service or airport service

- Rollout of Terminal Link bus service
- Bon voyage ceremony for an inaugural flight, such as the first daily nonstop to Madrid
- Announcement of a new airline or new route, such as the launch of the third daily flight to Heathrow
- Special aviation functions
 - Aviation Expo
- VIP/celebrity events or delegation
 - Politicians
 - Celebrities, professional athletes, returning Olympians
 - Trade delegations
- National conventions
 - AAAE 2010
 - ACI-NA 2008

Categories by Impact

While it's helpful to categorize events by type, it's even more useful to classify them by impact, based on the following criteria:

- Likelihood of disrupting airport operations
- Level of elevated security threat
- Scope of staff and budgetary resources required
- Potential to foster relationships with stakeholders and champion the Dallas-Ft. Worth Metroplex
- Opportunity to bolster DFW's national and international reputation, advance its interests, and undergird its influence by spotlighting the airport as the multimodal transportation gateway of choice

Accordingly, we've developed the following impact categories [redacted]. Let's take a look at each of them.