



2026 Flight Training Experience Awards Official Rules

The Flight Training Experience Awards were designed to promote and encourage the use of best practices in flight training as detailed in the ["The Flight Training Experience" research](#) conducted by the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association ("AOPA") in 2010. The awards program is designed to identify and recognize the flight schools and instructors evaluated as "best" through the eyes of their customers.

By participating in the 2026 Flight Training Experience Awards, you agree that you have read, understood, and accept all of the following rules and terms ("Official Rules") that will be used to help ensure that we recognize only the most qualified flight schools and instructors:

DATES OF CONTEST AND DEADLINES: The contest begins at 12:00pm (noon) Eastern Time on September 1, 2025, and ends at 12:00pm (noon) Eastern Time on October 31, 2025 ("Entry Period"). All award applications must be completed by October 24, 2025, and references must be completed by October 31, 2025.

NO ENTRY OR OTHER FEES: No purchase, payment, or consideration of any kind is necessary to enter or win this contest or will be accepted by Sponsor concerning this contest. This is a contest; this is not a game of chance. Winners will be chosen based on stated criteria.

ELIGIBILITY: The 2026 Flight Training Experience Awards (the "Contest") is open only to Flight Schools and Federal Aviation Administration Certificated Flight or Ground Instructors ("Instructors") who apply to receive an award and meet the following requirements:

1. The Instructor or representative submitting the application on behalf of the Flight School ("Flight School Representative") must be at least 18 years old at the time of entry.
2. The Instructor or Flight School Representative must be a legal resident of the 50 United States, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands.

3. The Instructor or Flight School Representative must be an AOPA member at the time of entry and at the time of award presentation.
4. Instructor and Flight Schools Representative consent to public posting of their report card result to the AOPA Airport Directory at <https://www.aopa.org/destinations/> and the Winner's List posted on AOPA's website. By submitting an application in this contest, the applicant consents to having their report card posted to the AOPA Airport Directory and the Winner's List posted on AOPA's website.
5. Instructors and Flight schools must be in compliance with any applicable operating rules and minimum standards as established by their airport operator/proprietor.
6. Employees of the AOPA and The AOPA Foundation, Inc. (AFI or the "Sponsor"), their respective parent companies, affiliates, retailers, subsidiaries, and their immediate families (parents, children, spouse, siblings) and those living in the same household, whether related or not), are not eligible to enter or win.

Additional Requirements for Instructors:

7. Instructors must hold an FAA issued Flight Instructor Certificate or Ground Instructor Certificate at the time of entry and at the time of award presentation.
8. Instructors must be able to identify at least five (5) qualifying references who must complete a questionnaire (see "How to Enter" below for more details).

Additional Requirements for Flight Schools:

9. Flying clubs are not eligible to participate in this Contest as a Flight School.
10. Each Flight School location constitutes a separate applicant for purposes of this Contest.
11. Flight Schools may be operated by any business entity (e.g., sole proprietorship, partnership, limited liability company, corporation or organization) providing flight or ground instruction under 14 CFR Parts 61, 141, or 142, but awards will be issued individually by location rather than to the overall business entity.
12. Flight Schools must be located in the 50 United States, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands.
13. Flight Schools must have an active business listing in the AOPA Airport Directory.
14. Flight Schools must be able to identify at least ten (10) qualifying references who must complete a questionnaire (see "How to Enter" below for more details).

Void outside of the aforementioned geographic areas and where prohibited by law. Contest is subject to all applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations.

HOW TO ENTER: To enter the Contest, the following steps must be completed by the Instructor or Flight School Representative (“Applicants”) and Applicant’s references:

1. **Complete Your Application:** You (the Applicant) must complete and submit an application through the online entry form at aopa.org/ftawards. The entry must fulfill all Contest requirements, as specified in the application, to be eligible for selection. Applications that are not complete or do not adhere to the Official Rules or specifications may be disqualified at the sole discretion of the Sponsor. Applicants must fill out the application in its entirety and any supporting documents (e.g., logbook entries) must be uploaded/submitted in the format specified and must comply with the stated requirements. Ensure all required fields are filled with accurate information.
2. **Identify Your References:**
If you are applying as a Flight or Ground Instructor, you must provide the names and contact details of at least five (5) references who have received flight instruction from you within the past 12 calendar months and who must complete a questionnaire about their flight training experience with you, including areas such as customer service, educational quality, information sharing, and community.

If you are applying as a Flight School, you must provide the names and contact details of at least ten (10) references who have received flight instruction from you within the past 12 calendar months and who must complete a questionnaire about their flight training experience with you, including areas such as customer service, educational quality, information sharing, and community.
3. **Submit Reference Information:** Ensure that you enter the correct contact details for each of your references. Your references will receive a questionnaire via email after you submit your application.
4. **References Complete Questionnaire:** It is your responsibility to inform your references that they will receive a questionnaire and request that they complete it promptly. The questionnaire must be completed and submitted by each reference by the end of the Entry Period for your application to be considered. One questionnaire per Reference.
5. **Confirm Receipt:** You are responsible for confirming that the minimum number of questionnaires required for your Application have been completed and submitted by your references by the end of the Entry Period. You may view the status of your Reference’s questionnaires by logging into your application at the link above.

IMPORTANT: YOUR APPLICATION WILL ONLY BE CONSIDERED IF THE MINIMUM NUMBER OF REQUIRED REFERENCES FOR YOUR APPLICATION COMPLETE AND SUBMIT THEIR QUESTIONNAIRES. IF YOU DO NOT RECEIVE THE MINIMUM NUMBER OF COMPLETE REFERENCE QUESTIONNAIRES FOR YOUR APPLICATION, YOUR ENTRY WILL BE DEEMED INELIGIBLE. MAKE SURE TO FOLLOW UP WITH YOUR REFERENCES TO ENSURE COMPLETION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE BEFORE THE END OF THE ENTRY PERIOD.

JUDGING: Entries will be evaluated by a panel of judges selected by Sponsor, which may include Sponsor's employees and/or third parties with flight training experience. All decisions by the judges are final and binding on all Applicants and entries.

Judging will take place between approximately November 1, 2025, and January 31, 2026. Applications will be considered in two separate categories, one for Instructors and one for Flight Schools. Judging for each category will consist of (i) an initial round, (ii) a second round, and (iii) a final round.

In the initial round of judging, entries will be evaluated based on their applications, references, and quantitative scoring to determine schools and CFIs who will rank within the top third of their region. These Applicants will then move on to the second round of judging.

The second round takes the top four to five (4-5) entries in each region before a blind committee process to determine the best in each region and select a regional winner in each of the six (6) regions. Any free responses submitted by References will be de-identified. Judges may also consider public customer reviews from the Applicant's business listings found in the AOPA Flight School Finder and AOPA Airport Directory.

The third round takes each of the six (6) Regional winners before the same committee to select a National Winner.

All Questionnaires completed by References must be in the Reference's own words and truthfully and accurately reflect the Reference's own opinions, beliefs, or experiences based on Reference's actual experience with the Applicant. Sponsor reserves the right to: (a) evaluate and weight recommendations based on detail, thoughtfulness, and content; and (b) disqualify any Application, Flight School, or Instructor that appears in Sponsor's sole discretion not to conform to the letter or spirit of the Official Rules, or appears to be attempting to undermine the legitimate operation of the Contest by cheating, deception, or other unfair practices.

PRIZES: There will be the following winners and prizes:

- Depending on the number of applicants, a number of Distinguished awards will be presented, each consisting of Round Crystal Award with an Approximate Retail Value (ARV) of \$27.

- Depending on the number of applicants, Distinguished Instructor awards recipients will also be presented with an Embroidered Patch with an Approximate Retail Value (ARV) of \$2.
- Depending on the number of applicants, Distinguished Flight School awards recipients will also be presented with a 5X5 Window Decal with an Approximate Retail Value (ARV) of \$2.
- Six (6) Regional Winners for Instructors, each receiving a prize of Blue Eclipse Crystal Award and a Regional Embroidered Patch with an ARV of \$79.
- Six (6) Regional Winners for Flight Schools, each receiving a prize of Blue Eclipse Crystal Award and a 5X5 Regional Window Decal with an ARV of \$79.
- One (1) National Winner for Instructors, receiving a prize of Crystal Tower Award and a National Embroidered Patch with an ARV of \$175.
- One (1) National Winner for Flight Schools, receiving a prize of Crystal Tower Award and a 5X5 National Window Decal with an ARV of \$175.

Prizes are non-transferable and no substitution or cash equivalent is allowed except in Sponsor's sole discretion. Sponsor reserves the right to substitute prizes of the same approximate retail value. For prizes \$600 or more in value, winner's social security number or taxpayer I.D. will be required in order to issue a Form 1099-MISC showing prize ARV as income to winner. Prize consists only of items specifically listed as part of the prize. All costs and expenses not specified herein, related to any prize, including but not limited to delivery and other expenses incurred by accepting the prize, are the sole responsibility of the winner.

Odds of winning depend on the number of entries received for each category and the quality of the entries received.

WINNER NOTIFICATION: Winners will be notified via email, mail, courier service, or phone.

DATA PRIVACY AND MEDIA RELEASE: Information that Applicants, References, and Judges provide to participate in the Contest, including but not limited to full name, city, and state may be used to administer the Contest, select and publicize winners, promotion of AOPA and AFI, and may be posted on the AOPA web site and media such as the AOPA Pilot and AOPA Flight Training magazines, and AOPA ePilot newsletter, among others, at Sponsor's sole discretion. Any other use of personal data will be in accordance with the Sponsor's Privacy Policy located at <https://foundation.aopa.org/privacy-policy>.

Except where prohibited by law, by accepting a prize, winner(s) grant the Sponsor and AOPA permission to use their names, city and state, statements, images, voices, photographs, and likenesses worldwide, in perpetuity, without the right to review, in any and all media now known or hereinafter invented in any and all marketing and promotional materials and waive any claims to royalty, right, or remuneration for such use. Each winner's name, city, and state may be included in a publicly available winners list.

LIABILITY RELEASE: By participating in the Contest, each Applicant and Reference agrees: (a) to be bound by these Official Rules and by the decisions of the Sponsor and to waive any right to claim ambiguity in the Contest, these Official Rules, or any other documents required by Sponsor; (b) to indemnify, defend and hold harmless AOPA, AFI, and their respective trustees, officers, directors, employees, shareholders, representatives and agents (collectively, the “Released Parties”) from and against any and all liability, claims, losses, damages, demands, causes of action, penalties and expenses arising out of or related to any statement, action or failure to act by Applicant or Reference during or in connection with their participation in the Contest and/or any breach or alleged breach of these Official Rules or of any other documents required by Sponsor and, (c) not to sue and to hereby irrevocably and unconditionally release, waive and forever discharge the Released Parties, from any and all liabilities, claims and demands of any kind or nature whatsoever, in law or equity, whether known or unknown, which Applicant or Reference (or their successors-in interest, heirs and/or agents) ever had, now have, or in the future may have against the Released Parties, including, but not limited to claims arising out of or related to any malfunction or other problem with the Contest website, any error in the collection or retention of entry information, and any typographical or other error. Sponsor reserves the right to cancel, suspend and/or modify the Contest, or any part of it, if any fraud, technical failures, or any other factor beyond Sponsor’s reasonable control impairs the integrity or proper functioning of the Contest, as determined by Sponsor in its absolute and sole discretion. In such event, Sponsor reserves the right to award the prize(s) (per the winner determination procedures in these Rules) from among the eligible entries received up to the time of the impairment.

By participating in this Contest, each Applicant and Reference expressly waives and relinquishes all rights and benefits afforded by California Civil Code 1542 and does so understanding and acknowledging the significance of this waiver. Section 1542 states as follows: “A GENERAL RELEASE DOES NOT EXTEND TO CLAIMS THAT THE CREDITOR OR RELEASING PARTY DID NOT KNOW OR SUSPECT TO EXIST IN HIS OR HER FAVOR AT THE TIME OF EXECUTING THE RELEASE AND THAT, IF KNOWN, BY HIM OR HER, WOULD HAVE MATERIALLY AFFECTED HIS OR HER SETTLEMENT WITH THE DEBTOR OR THE RELEASED PARTIES.

CHOICE OF LAW: Each Applicant and Reference agrees that any and all disputes and causes of action arising out of these Official Rules or this contest shall be resolved individually, and any judicial proceeding shall take place in a federal or state courts serving Frederick County, Maryland. All issues and questions concerning the construction, validity, interpretation and enforceability of these Official Rules, or the rights and obligations of participants and Sponsor and AOPA in connection with the contest, shall be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of the State of Maryland, without giving effect to any choice of law or conflict of law rules or provisions (whether of the State of Maryland or any other jurisdiction) that would cause the application of the laws of any jurisdiction other than the State of Maryland.

WINNERS LIST: For a list of prize winners for a Contest, write your name and address on a 3"x 5" card and mail it along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: 2026 Flight Training Experience Awards, 421 Aviation Way, Frederick, MD 21701. Requests for a copy of the winners' list will only be accepted after the end of the Contest, and requests must be received no later than thirty days after such date. Responses to complete and timely requests for winners' lists will be sent as soon as reasonably practicable following finalization of all winners for the Contest and announcement of the winners.

The Contest is in no way promoted, endorsed or administered by sponsored by, or associated with any social media entity, including but not limited to: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter or Instagram. Any questions, comments or complaints regarding the Contest must be directed to Sponsor.

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