



AIRPORT VOLUNTEER AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

Benchmarking Report

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Airport Ambassador Program Benchmarking Report

Introduction

Airports across the nation have utilized volunteers for many years to help with their customer service needs. These volunteers, often called “airport ambassadors”, are a key component of the customer service component for numerous airports nationwide.

The primary focus for these programs is to enhance the airport travelers experience, by providing information to guests as they try to navigate through airports. The questions are usually about where to find the rental cars, where they can pick up their Uber, where is the airport shuttle to their hotel, and the like. When managed effectively, a robust airport ambassador program can greatly improve the airport experience for the flying customer and gives a positive reaction to flying into and out of a given city.

With the City of Kansas City building a brand-new terminal, slated to open in early 2023, now is a good time to look at comparable airports to see how they run their airport ambassador program. This benchmarking data can effectively guide how KCI crafts their airport ambassador program going forward.

Peer Airports

For the purposes of this study, a total of six peer airports were chosen. They are:

1. Dallas Love Field (DAL)
2. Austin Bergstrom Airport (AUS)
3. Houston Hobby (HOU)
4. Indianapolis (IND)
5. Cleveland (CLE)
6. Cincinnati (CVG)

The metrics for benchmarking comparison are:

1. Onboards
2. Number of terminals
3. Number of security checkpoints
4. Number of volunteer airport ambassadors
5. Number or hours of training of ambassadors:
6. Number of paid staff overseeing volunteers
7. Number of special events for volunteers

8. Average age of volunteer:

The airports were chosen to be comparable facilities, that would have many of the same qualities of the new KCI terminal. The amount of onboards are similar, and for the most part, these airports are single terminals with a single security checkpoint.

The current KCI terminal layout is problematic for the deployment of airport ambassadors, due to the number of gates that have distinct TSA security checkpoints. The new terminal will be a single facility, with a single TSA security checkpoint. Such a layout will most likely need airport ambassadors to be deployed within the secure area of the new KCI terminal. Therefore, looking how current single terminal facilities, with a single TSA checkpoint, will be beneficial to KCI airport officials to effectively deploy their volunteers.

In addition, seeing how peer airports, recruit, train and retain their volunteers will be beneficial for the new KCI terminal to adopt best practices to ensure the new KCI terminal airport ambassador program is a success.

DALLAS LOVE FIELD (DAL)



ONBOARDS: 8,090,691

TERMINALS: 1

SECURITY CHECKPOINTS: 1

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS IN AIRPORT AMBASSADOR PROGRAM: 14 currently (Goal is 20)

NUMBER OF HOURS TRAINING OF AMBASSADORS: 8 hours for a one-day orientation tour

NUMBER OF PAID STAFF OVERSEEING VOLUNTEERS: 2

NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS FOR VOLUNTEERS: 5 – quarterly luncheons and a 5k race on the runway

AVERAGE OF VOLUNTEER: 65

POINT OF CONTACT: Heather Estrada, Interim Manager III, Customer Experience.

The Dallas Love Field airport ambassador program are known as “Love Helpers.” The program began in 2005. Dallas Love Field utilizes their volunteer ambassador program in 4 distinct areas – 1 at baggage claim, 1 at the new parking garage (Garage C), 1 at the waiting area by the information desk and one “floater” who roams around the terminal to answer questions.

The average volunteer is around 65 years old; many of them are Southwest Airlines retirees. They undergo an initial one-day orientation, where they are told of departmental procedures and policies, airport improvements, and are given a full airport tour. Love Helpers are also provided an ambassador handbook that they take with them while they work.



Love Field utilizes a variety of methods to recruit these volunteers, including [Volunteer Now](#), a 501 © 3 nonprofit organization that pares volunteers with organizations that are searching for help.

A total of four quarterly luncheons are held for the volunteers for team building and information sharing. In addition, they are invited to participate in several special events, including a 5K race that is held on the runway.

For their time, Love Helpers are provided with free parking, that they can utilize whenever they like. Many Love

Helpers take advantage of the free parking when they fly out of Love Field for long trips.



AUSTIN BERGSTROM (AUS)



ONBOARDS: 7,763,461

TERMINALS: 2

SECURITY CHECKPOINTS: 3 checkpoints in the main terminal (Barbara Jordan). South Terminal has 1 one checkpoint

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS IN AIRPORT AMBASSADOR PROGRAM: 35

NUMBER OF HOURS TRAINING OF AMBASSADORS: 16 hours

NUMBER OF PAID STAFF OVERSEEING VOLUNTEERS: A total of 3 – 1 Manager and 2 supervisors. There are also 10 FTE temporary Customer Service Representatives (CSR) that help with oversight

NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS FOR VOLUNTEERS: 4 activities a year, including a “go and see it” trip for new restaurants, or a museum, etc. Something that will help the volunteers do their job better.

AVERAGE OF VOLUNTEER: 65

POINT OF CONTACT: Tabatha Shaw, Aviation Guest Services Supervisor



The City of Austin utilizes a combination of college students and retirees for its Airport Ambassador Program. Students come from the University of Texas, St. Edwards College and Texas State University. Retirees make up 27% of the volunteer force, and city officials state they prefer them to students because they are more willing to work multiple shifts.

They also have retirees who have volunteered well over a decade for their program.

The program also has multiple bilingual speakers, including Spanish, French, German, Chinese, and Vietnamese. City officials have had success recruiting volunteers through attending cultural events in the Austin area. In fact, a visit to the Austin Asian Cultural Center is where they were able to gain several volunteers. The City has special buttons the bilingual/multilingual volunteers wear in order to be easily identified by a foreign language speaker.

The program tries to incorporate fun activities to help retain volunteers. Recently they conducted an airport scavenger hunt within the terminal. They also have had events at the Delta Sky Club and numerous restaurants within the City.

As for benefits, the airport provides free parking – for work or for vacation - at the airport, discounts with vendors within the airport, and free CapMetro I-ride cards for those volunteers who prefer to take public transit.

HOUSTON HOBBY (HOU)



ONBOARDS: 7,146,910

TERMINALS: 1

SECURITY CHECKPOINTS: 1

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS IN AIRPORT AMBASSADOR PROGRAM: 36

NUMBER OF HOURS TRAINING OF AMBASSADORS: 16 hours of training

NUMBER OF PAID STAFF OVERSEEING VOLUNTEERS: 1 supervisor

NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS FOR VOLUNTEERS:

AVERAGE OF VOLUNTEER: 65

POINT OF CONTACT: Trai Hicks, Assistant Customer Service Manager

Houston Hobby currently has 36 active volunteers in their airport ambassador program, but they would like 70 to ensure 100% coverage of their airport.

The City recruits new volunteers in the local tabloid “Green sheet” that is found at local gas stations, convenience stores and grocery stores in the region. In addition, they target book clubs, wine clubs and church committees with public speaking events in the hopes this will lead to interest in volunteering at one of their airports.

Their volunteers tend to be, for the most part, retirees. Although interestingly enough, they do not have any retired airline workers. They would like younger volunteers, specifically college students, but at the moment they do not have any.

Airport officials provide a manual for each volunteer and conduct 16 hours of training with new volunteers before they are allowed to go out on their own and cover a shift.



A couple of their volunteers are multilingual; they have volunteers who can speak Spanish. One volunteer speaks Mandarin Chinese.

To help retain volunteers, the airport has two special events, a summer appreciation luncheon and a Christmas luncheon. They also provide free customer service training for volunteers to get certified as “Houston Friendly.” Houston Friendly is a training program conducted by [Visit Houston](#), the local convention and visitors bureau.

Houston recently hired a consultant to look at other airport ambassador programs nationwide, and airport officials are looking at Dallas Fort Worth (DFW) and the Denver (DEN) airports ambassador program, where they utilize paid staff as a part of their ambassador program. They also utilize a paid internship program. Houston officials are considering replicating some of this going forward.

INDIANAPOLIS (IND)



ONBOARDS: 4,632,585

TERMINALS: 1

SECURITY CHECKPOINTS: 1

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS IN AIRPORT AMBASSADOR PROGRAM: 21

NUMBER OF HOURS TRAINING OF AMBASSADORS: On the job training by peers and Guest Services Staff

NUMBER OF PAID STAFF OVERSEEING VOLUNTEERS: 1

NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS FOR VOLUNTEERS:

AVERAGE OF VOLUNTEER: 65

POINT OF CONTACT: Brian Eckstein, Guest Services Manager

The City of Indianapolis recently opened a new airport terminal in 2008. In order to better serve the needs of their customers, Indianapolis airport officials hired 100 temporary airport ambassador volunteers for 8 months to help with the transition. The airport recruited these temporary paid volunteers themselves; they decided not to utilize an outside firm to help keep costs down. These temporary volunteers did all day trainings for two full days. They also toured the new terminal before it was opened to help familiarize themselves with the new facility. City officials found the surge in additional airport ambassadors crucial to the success of the new terminal opening. After their paid temporary contract ended, a few individuals stayed on as unpaid volunteers.



For their permanent volunteers, airport officials conduct on the job training with existing volunteers and guest services staff. They primarily recruit new volunteers through their website. As for perks, the volunteers are

giving free airport parking and receive the same discount as employees at the airport.

Indianapolis has had some high-profile events, such as the Super Bowl, where they coordinated with the Visit Indy even more than usual. Coordination with Visit Indy is important at all times.

Cincinnati (CVG)



ONBOARDS: 4,632,585

TERMINALS: 1

SECURITY CHECKPOINTS: 1

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS IN AIRPORT AMBASSADOR PROGRAM: 115

NUMBER OF HOURS TRAINING OF AMBASSADORS: New Ambassadors train with seasoned colleagues for 3, 4 hour shifts (12 hours total)

NUMBER OF PAID STAFF OVERSEEING VOLUNTEERS: 1 Customer Service Lead

NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS FOR VOLUNTEERS: Seasonal parties, including a holiday party

AVERAGE OF VOLUNTEER: 75

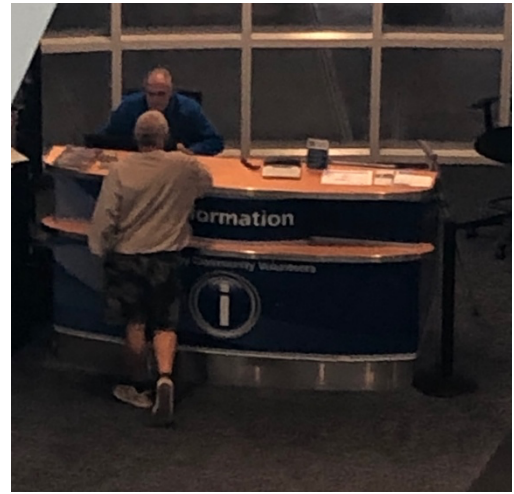
POINT OF CONTACT: Wendi Orlando, Senior Manager, Customer Relations

The Cincinnati has a robust airport ambassador program with 115 volunteers currently on the schedule. CVG utilizes a variety of tools to recruit new ambassadors including: Facebook, Twitter, retiree groups, nursing homes and high schools where community service hours are required.

In addition, airport officials utilize special events for the volunteers, such as a summer picnic that has a baseball game. They work with local businesses to provide free door prizes, such as gift cards at these events. The holiday party has even more perks for the volunteers, including the awarding of years of service awards. One ambassador this last year received her 25th year pin. The holiday party is a

catered party that even includes a band for live music. The budget for the holiday event is \$8,000 to \$10,000.

To keep the airport ambassadors well informed, a number of “Go and See it” tours are scheduled with help of the Cincinnati Tourism and Convention board.



CLEVELAND (CLE)



ONBOARDS: 4,632,585

TERMINALS: 1

SECURITY CHECKPOINTS: 1

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS IN AIRPORT AMBASSADOR PROGRAM: 75 (50 are active)

NUMBER OF HOURS TRAINING OF AMBASSADORS: 2 weeks of ambassador training, and then required airport SIDA and customer service training to have a security badge

NUMBER OF PAID STAFF OVERSEEING VOLUNTEERS: 2

NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS FOR VOLUNTEERS: 4

AVERAGE OF VOLUNTEER: 70

POINT OF CONTACT: Todd Payne, Chief, Marketing & Air Service Development at Cleveland Airport System

The Cleveland airport has 50 active volunteers in their airport ambassador program. The average age of their volunteer is approximately 70 years old. Many of their volunteers had an active professional life before retiring; and airport officials say they have great retention of existing volunteers. They state



one of the reasons for retention includes letting volunteers self-select a lead volunteer who acts a liaison with city staff. In addition, the volunteers have their own office where they can get coffee, socialize and leave personal items. Airport officials buy snacks and bottle water to stock the volunteer office as an amenity.

To help with training, Cleveland interfaces with [This is Cleveland](#) for additional training. 5 airport ambassadors are allotted spots annual with the Cleveland Convention and Visitors Bureau.

To recruit new airport ambassadors, Cleveland utilizes primarily word of mouth. They used to go to lots of senior events, but found current volunteers are the best at identifying new potential



ambassadors. The airport also utilizes quarterly luncheons and an award banquet where volunteers who collect enough points (hours volunteered) are recognized and awarded. The budget of the annual dinner is approximately \$1,300. Volunteers also receive free airport parking and the airport employee discount, which is 10% to 20% of items purchased at the airport.

Kansas City (MCI) (current terminals – B & C)



ONBOARDS: 5,878,739

TERMINALS: 2 (Changes to 1 terminal when new terminal opens)

SECURITY CHECKPOINTS: X

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS IN AIRPORT AMBASSADOR PROGRAM: 15

NUMBER OF HOURS TRAINING OF AMBASSADORS: ½ day of training, then shadowing current volunteers, and tour of facility.

NUMBER OF PAID STAFF OVERSEEING VOLUNTEERS: 1

NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS FOR VOLUNTEERS: 2

AVERAGE OF VOLUNTEER: 70+

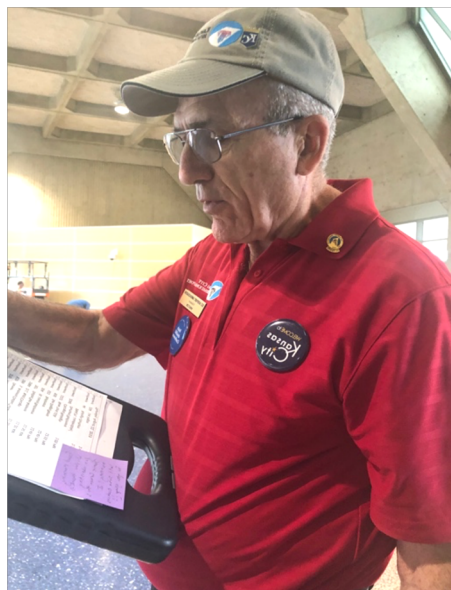
POINT OF CONTACT: Michelle Mallory, Customer Service & Volunteer Coordinator

The current KCI facility has two terminals – B & C. Volunteers have been utilized at the facility since 1998. At that time there were 60 volunteers, currently the number is 15. Airport officials state they would like more to ensure there is coverage of the two terminals.

Current training of new volunteers entails a ½ day of formal training, where they cover airport policies and procedures. New volunteers also do a tour with airport police, to become familiarized with them, and also are given training on such topics how to respond to a tornado warning and a possible active shooter. The new volunteers then shadow current volunteers before they are allowed to start their own shifts.

When a volunteer begins their day, they first check in to the airport office before beginning their shifts. While there, they grab a flight schedule, wings button souvenirs for children, and check any flight updates.

KCI ambassadors focus on high traffic areas, such as baggage claim to focus their efforts. They are often asked where to catch a cab, an Uber or how to get to the rental car facility.



To recruit new volunteers, airport officials utilize the airport's website. They have in the past tried other avenues, such as Serve KC, but found those were not good fits, for they often had requirements that would not work for the KCI airport ambassador program. Airport officials have reached out to local universities, such as UMKC and Park University, in hopes in getting college age volunteers, but that has worked out so far, as the schools have not determined if volunteering at the airport would satisfy the public service hours requirement.

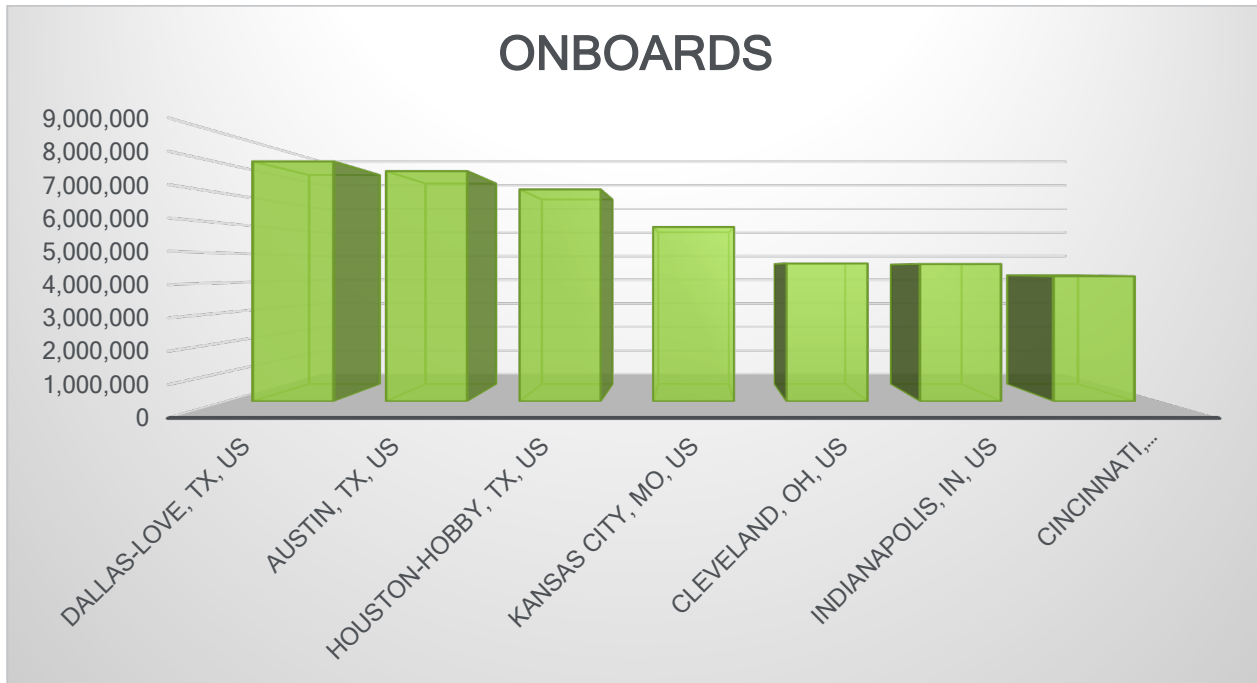
The airport requires a 4 hour per week commitment. Some volunteers choose to work more. They get free parking in the employee lot. Many volunteers take advantage of that perk when they travel out of Kansas City.

There are two functions for the volunteers – an awards banquet and an outing, where they are fed lunch and tour a Kansas City tourist attraction. In the past, they have toured Kansas City barbecue restaurants and took the Kansas City gangster tour bus. These activities are popular with the volunteers, and prove beneficial to provide first person accounts of some of the city's amenities.

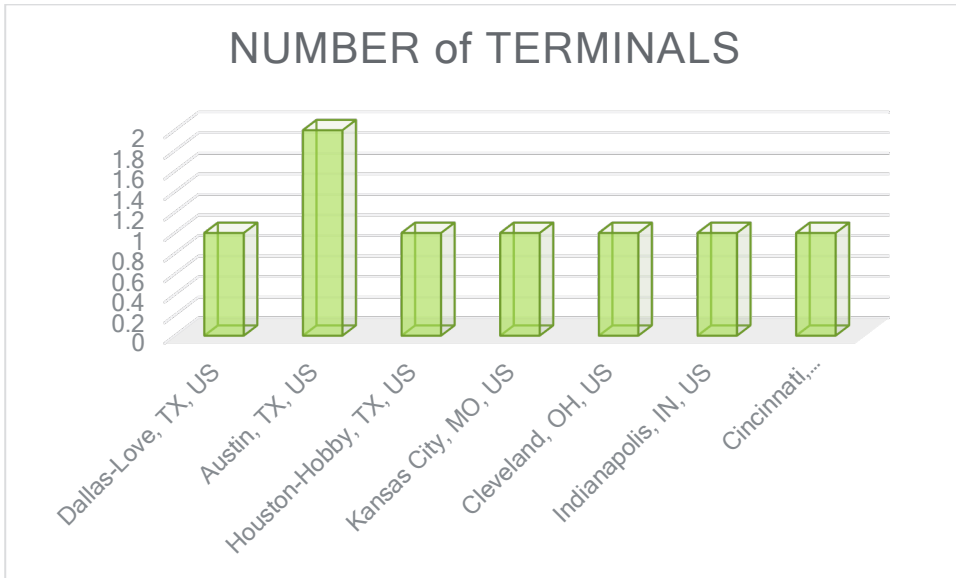
The December holiday party is when the awards banquet takes place. The banquet provides recognition for service hours at 500, 1,000, 3,000 or 5,000 hours. They also provide the volunteers with door prizes.

BENCHMARKING ANALYSIS

Kansas City is statistically right in the middle of the amount of onboards annually for this analysis. Dallas Love Field has the most – over 8 million a year. Cincinnati has the least with only 4.2 million annually. Kansas City has 5.8 million onboards annually.



The peer cities selected are all single terminal facilities, with the exception being Austin Bergstrom.



Kansas City is on the lower end of the spectrum when it comes to the amount of airport ambassador volunteers with 15 volunteers. Only Dallas Love Field has less, with 14. Cincinnati has the most by far with 118. The average is 42.

