



# Hidalgo County UAS Program policy

**I. Purpose:**

The purpose of the Hidalgo County Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) Program is to support and augment County operations through improved efficiency with aerial equipment and create new opportunities to provide for the health, safety and welfare of the public and County staff. This UAS Policy and associated procedures are intended to ensure the safe and responsible operation of the County's unmanned aircraft, regardless of the nature of the mission.

**II. Policy Statement:**

Unmanned Aerial Systems provide Hidalgo County with the ability to safely and cost-effectively, augments government services, improve efficiency of various tasks and improve the safety of the public and emergency responders. We believe it prudent to maintain personnel trained in the use of unmanned aircraft systems and to use this resource to protect life and property and to support County departments in providing services to Hidalgo County citizens. HCUAS flight team members are authorized to utilize the UAS and associated technologies, in furtherance of county business to supplement, improve and expedite emergency management, search & rescue activities, law enforcement, , mapping and measuring, improving situational awareness, conducting damage assessments, and to perform any other task made more safe and cost-effective through the UAS. Safety and privacy concerns are priorities in the implementation of the program.

This policy is not intended to be all-inclusive, but a supplement to other UAS guidelines, Federal Aviation Regulations, all other applicable County policies and procedures, as well as aircraft manufacturers' approved flight manuals, etc. Operational guidelines and procedures will be developed through the UAS Program and the HCUAS Program Team.

### III. Definitions:

- AGL: Above Ground Level.
- COA: Certificate of Waiver or Authorization issued by the FAA granting permission of the requesting agency operating as public aircraft for a specific UAS activity.
- FAA: Federal Aviation Administration.
- FARs: Federal Aviation Regulations. For the purpose of conducting civil UAS operations this is generally 14 CFR Part 107 and Advisory Circular 107-2.
- GCS: Ground Control System – System of personnel and equipment which controls the UAV flight operation, and sends and receives data or media during a UAS Mission.
- Non-Participant: A person not involved in the event or operation, however in the area of or directly affected by the UAS flight or operation such as members of the media or by-standers.
- (s)UAS: (Small) Unmanned Aircraft System [14 CFR Part 107] – UAV, GCS, flight cameras, data and media collection systems. A sUAS is greater than .55lbs and less than 55lbs in flight.
- HCUAS Flight Team: The group of individuals responsible for the implementation of any UAS Mission authorized by this policy. This includes at minimum one UAV PIC. This may also include UAV Observers, UAV PMC, and UAS Equipment Operator(s).
- UAS Mission: A Flight operation performed by a UAV including planning, pre-flight operations, deployment, operation of the UAV and post-flight operations.
- UAS Equipment Operator: Person participating in UAS Mission responsible for operation of any ground-based equipment supporting the UAV apart from flight controls.
- UAS Program Manager: Person Designated by Hidalgo County Executive Office, to implement UAS Program.
- UAS Program Team: The in-house Hidalgo County team that consists of the UAS Program Manager and all UAS Project Coordinators.
- UAS Project: A County UAS project developed by a Project Coordinator and vetted by HCUAS Program Team for implementation of UAS for a departmental task.
- UAS (Departmental) Project Coordinator: Person designated by a Department Head or Elected Official to participate in UAS Program Team and implement UAS Program for their department.
- UAS Participant: A person participating in an event under County operations or under an Incident Command System with an ongoing UAS Mission. This includes persons being the object of the operation, such as a person in need of rescue.
- UAV: Unmanned Aerial Vehicle .
- UAV (Visual) Observer: Visual Observer – Person acting as safety officer in direct contact with UAV PIC and UAV PMC during UAS mission responsible for relaying observations and hazards to the UAV PMC and to maintain situational

awareness of GCS environment and UAV flight environment.

UAV (Remote) PIC: Pilot in Command – UAV Pilot remotely in control of a County UAV and is the final authority over UAV operations during a UAS Mission; provided, that all missions will be conducted in accordance with approved Project guidelines and parameters. A UAV PIC must be in control or able to immediately take manual control of a UAV in flight at all times and must be certified under Hidalgo County UAS Program to be a PIC for UAS Missions and hold a valid FAA Remote Pilot Certification with a UAS rating.

UAV (Remote) PMC: Person Manipulating Controls – Person certified through Hidalgo County UAS Program to operate a UAV in flight during a UAS Mission. The PMC must have a valid FAA Remote Pilot Certification with a UAS rating

**IV. Applicability:**

This policy applies to all County departments and offices that utilize the County's UAS program. The UAS will only be operated by County employees trained and certified through the County's UAS Program and/or the FAA, as applicable.

**V. Compliance:**

It shall be the responsibility of each County Department Head (DH) and Elected Official (EO), as well as the UAS Program Manager and Office of Emergency Management, to ensure compliance with this policy and procedures adopted under the policy.

**VI. General Provisions:**

The Hidalgo County UAS Program will be an iterative system created with the intent and understanding that as an emerging technology, the equipment, capabilities, regulations, acceptance and uses of the UAS may evolve over time. Hidalgo County will make the best use of the technology through continuing training, education and experience.

All County departments and offices will have access to UAS technology and may request participation in the program for County operations. The UAS may be used during multi-agency operations involving County resources or having County responsibility and may be utilized through agreement with other local government agencies. The UAS may also be used through the LRGVDC mutual aid agreements. Priority of the UAS will be given to emergency support within Hidalgo County over other operations. Only Hidalgo County UAV PICs will operate the Hidalgo County UAVs regardless of jurisdiction or mission location.

**A) UAS Program**

The UAS Program will be managed through the Hidalgo County Executive Office. A UAS Program Manager will be assigned by the Office of Emergency Management. For any County department or office that intends to use the UAS, it is the responsibility of the Department Head or Elected Official to assign a UAS Project Coordinator to participate in the UAS Program Team and to coordinate usage of the equipment by

that department or office and to develop their UAS Projects.

The UAS Program Manager or designee will be responsible for overall management of the UAS, implementation of the program, development of procedures and ensuring internal and external compliance with FAA and/or other regulatory agencies. The UAS Program Manager will work with the Department Heads and Elected Officials to educate their employees on the uses and benefits of the technology and to facilitate participation in the UAS Program. The UAS Program Manager or designee will be responsible for collecting flight logs and completing any reporting required by the FAA or other applicable agency.

The UAS Project Coordinators will work closely with each other and the UAS Program Manager to manage and develop the UAS Program; they will be responsible for coordinating their departmental participation in the UAS Program including development of their UAS Projects and their implementation of the UAS Program.

UAS Program development will be through the UAS Program Team. Regular meetings of the UAS Program Team will be held to assess and develop the program at intervals determined by the Team.

All use or implementation of the UAS will follow this UAS Policy and will be through development of UAS Projects and UAS Missions.

B) Recordkeeping

UAS Project Coordinators, UAS PICs and UAS PMCs will be responsible for maintaining operational records required by the UAS Program or FAA requirements and for making those records available to the UAS Program Manager.

Any department or office collecting any type of data and/or records using the UAS is responsible to ensure compliance with Texas Administrative Code *Title 13 Part 1 Chapter 7 Subchapter D §7.125* records retention schedules, chain of custody or security measures of the collecting department. The UAS Project Coordinator for each department or office is the custodian of the data and records collected.

C) Public Participation

The UAS Program Manager will work with County Administration to educate and inform the public concerning use of the UAS to ensure understanding of its purpose, benefits and proper utilization in each programmatic application.

The ability to observe UAS Training, UAS Missions or other demonstrations will be made available to the extent it is reasonable, safe and will not interfere in the mission or training objective.

D) Privacy

The public's right to privacy and civil liberties will be paramount in UAS Project development and UAS Mission planning. Each UAS Project will describe privacy considerations, applicable privacy laws, and data collection types and methodology, data use, data retention and data dissemination specific to the project objective. Failure to respect privacy concerns and adhere to Project guidelines and parameters may result in removal from the UAS Program Team, and could result in disciplinary action for employees, up to and including termination, and dismissal of volunteers from search and rescue, law enforcement and other volunteer groups working with the County.

UAS Projects will be reviewed by the UAS Program Team and legal counsel annually through 2019 and every third year thereafter for compliance with common privacy and

civil liberties practices, regulations or laws.

E) Equipment

Hidalgo County UAS equipment will be managed under the Executive Office. The UAS Program Manager will be responsible for ensuring all users of the equipment have appropriate levels of training, verifying certifications and ensuring the UAS is properly maintained. All supporting software, equipment registrations, radio licensing or other federal programs and requirements will be obtained or monitored by the UAS Program Manager.

The Purchase or housing of additional UAS equipment is prohibited unless approved by Executive Office and UAS Program Manager is notified of such equipment. The UAS Project Coordinator of any department housing or purchasing equipment such as a UAV, flight camera or other aerial equipment is responsible for compliance with this UAS Policy and the UAS Program, and to coordinate these efforts with UAS Program Manager.

F) Training

All members of the Hidalgo County UAS Program Team are required to complete training outlined in the UAS Program Procedures and will be required to perform regular practice, participation or continuing education as required by the program. Certain operations have requirements by the FAA that must be fulfilled in order to perform functions such as piloting a UAV or overseeing flight operations during UAS Missions. If the Department requires a Visual Observer the person designated as Visual Observer must attend county approved training.

PICs must maintain UAV proficiency with a minimum of 4 hours of flight time within a calendar month. Members who do not have any documented training or flight time with a span of 90 days shall be grounded until the completion of required flight time hours.

All training will be pre-approved in writing by the appropriate UAS Project Coordinator and based on departmental and UAS Program Procedures. All trainings will be posted through UAS Program schedule.

G) Certification

Only participants of the UAS Program Team who successfully complete Hidalgo County UAS training program and, if necessary, FAA certification for the operation of a small UAV, will be considered certified to function as part of a UAS Flight Team for UAS Missions. Certified persons on the UAS Flight Team may include UAV PIC, UAV PMC, UAV Observer and UAS Equipment Operators.

Non-Certified persons include a UAS Participant and a Non-Participant.

H) Basic UAS Program

The Basic UAS Program includes any operations that fall under FAA guidelines and limitations outlined under what is known as "FAA Part 107". This generally includes rules regarding the speeds, distances and environmental conditions available to create safe and easily manageable operations along with associated FAA training.

I) Special UAS Services Program

The Special Services Program relates to public safety and emergency situations that may be authorized under a COA or Part 107 waiver. The purpose of the COA or Part 107 waiver is to allow the County to conduct public aircraft operations to meet the

County needs for public safety and emergency situations.

J) UAS Mission Implementation

UAS Missions will only be performed if requested by or through a UAS Project Coordinator and posted to a UAS Program schedule. UAS Missions fitting a pre-approved UAS Project may be approved by the UAS Project Coordinator. UAS Missions outside the pre-approved UAS Projects will need additional approval by either the County Sheriff or his designee for any law enforcement related mission, and by the Office of Emergency Management or Fire Marshal's Office for search and rescue, wildfire or other operation.

Requests for support by outside agencies will be made through the Office of Emergency Management and will require additional approval by the UAS Program Manager and the Executive Office, and/or the County Sheriff or his designee for any statutory duty related to law enforcement.

A UAS Mission shall only be performed if deemed safe by the UAV PIC, is within the certified limits of the UAV PIC and is within the limitations of FAA Part 107 or Certificate of Waiver or Authorization.

HCUAS Flight team members must contact Hidalgo County Sheriff's Office Communications to notify them of any/all UAV flights. (Prior to UAV launch and after assignment completion)

K) Coordination with Other Agencies

All UAS Missions will be coordinated with other appropriate agencies, Incident Command of an emergency or disaster, or as required by the FAA or other regulatory agency, or as required by Hidalgo County's UAS Program Procedures.

L) Large Scale Emergency Events

In the event of a large scale emergency that effects Hidalgo County. The UAS Program Manager or Office of Emergency Management may request assistance from Departments that are part of the UAS Program. HCUAS flight teams may be tasked to conduct flight missions in affected areas.

M) Maintenance of Components

The UAS maintenance requirements for aircraft components include preventative maintenance, overhaul of components, replacement parts, and total time in service. The maintenance records contain the history and scheduled maintenance requirements for each UAS. Departments in the UAS program shall use maintenance records for UAV replacement or retirement considerations.