HOW TO START A SOARING CLUB

This paper outlines the basic points which must be considered in the formation of a soaring club, and suggests some basic concepts to be applied in club formation and subsequent group operations.

I. Purpose and Concept

A. Definition of Purpose

The first item of business in the formation of a club is the definition of the intended purpose of the club. The purpose of existence then serves as a guide for subsequent decisions. The primary purpose for the organization of soaring clubs can be divided into two categories:

1. To make available to a group, sailplane(s) and/or launch facilities which they individually could not afford.

2. To provide social fellowship with others who have a common interest in the sport of soaring.

There are as many shades of emphasis placed on the above categories as there are clubs. Most clubs include equipment and fellowship to some degree. However, this paper discusses the organizational problems associated with (a) above.

B. Club Policy

Having decided that the primary purpose of the club to be formed is the provision of soaring equipment and facilities, other decisions affecting future club policy must be made. For instance, it should be established that either:

1. It is intended that the club grow in size, and, hence in equipment and facilities, as club activities become publicized and the sport of soaring becomes more popular. The club may take upon itself the responsibilities of training new soaring enthusiasts and in general furthering soaring as a sport, art and science.

2. It is intended that the club remain fixed in size and equipment inventory, accepting new members only as shares are available and concentrating on activities other than training.

Here, again, there are many compromises available between the two extremes outlined. However, a decision on general policy will greatly aid club organization. It is suggested that provision be made in planning for the club to grow at least to a size where it can support a sailplane and a towplane or other launch facilities. This then would provide club benefits to members who eventually purchase their own equipment, and will hold together the soaring enthusiasts in a locality.

II. Organization

A. Types of Soaring Organizations

1. Partnership

A partnership is usually a very informal organization of individuals banded together for the purpose of buying equipment, usually a sailplane. Income is generally limited to regular payments made into a maintenance fund or derived by assessment to the partners as the need arises.

The major disadvantage of a partnership is that all members are liable for the action of any one member. Protection against the consequences of legal action taken against one member may be afforded by insurance or by incorporation of the group. Incorporation of the group will put it in the "club" class because of organizational requirements. Hence, partnerships are best entered into by a small number of individuals. If the total group interested in the organization numbers more than approximately five, formation of an incorporated club should be strongly considered.

2. Club

A club is a more formal organization than a partnership, and is usually considerably larger. The larger size creates administrative considerations requiring club operation under a group of elected officers. The organization of a club requires initial effort to set up bylaws, rules and procedures adequate not only for the new club, but also for the expanded versions of the club which are likely to occur. Regular club meetings are usually necessary to keep the club running in an efficient manner. A well organized, efficiently managed club can conquer organizational, financial and operational problems to provide comparatively cheap soaring fun for clubs with less than ten members to a hundred or more. It is this type of organization which will be discussed more fully in this paper.

3. Council or Association

The council or association may function as a soaring club in that it may own and operate sailplanes. However, many organizations of this type do not own or operate equipment, but serve as a service organization banding together small clubs, private owners and other individuals having an interest in soaring. This organization can then sponsor various efforts for the benefit of the sport, and can represent the soaring individual in the field of public relations, in dealing with FAA and airport personnel, etc.

B. Name Selection

In keeping with the technical development of the sport of soaring apart from primary type gliders, it is suggested that the word "soaring" or "sailplane" be selected for use in the club name. "Gliders" or "gliding" are associated by the uninformed public with primary type gliders or hang gliders and the accompanying dangers. It is our hope to educate the public to the sport by publicizing "sailplanes" and "soaring".

C. Incorporation

Incorporation of the club will protect the individuals of the club against irresponsible actions of other members. In addition, certain tax benefits may be provided. The club should be incorporated as soon as appropriate Articles of Incorporation and bylaws can be written. This should be done prior to the purchase and operation of any club equipment or facilities. Incorporation is handled by individual state governments and forms can be requested through state offices. Filing can be straightforward and does not often require legal assistance.

D. Club Bylaws

The bylaws of the club are the firm rules by which the club is operated. Much thought should go into their preparation. They should be made easy to change when necessary, but not easy enough that they will be altered at every whim of a small group of members. The bylaws should describe:

1. Club purpose;
2. Membership classes and requirements;
3. Election and organization details;
4. Duties of all permanent officers and committees;
5. Powers of membership and executive committee;
6. Meeting requirements;
7. Methods of amending bylaws;
8. Other important, relatively fixed items of club policy;
9. Provision for club dissolution and dispersal of equipment.

Suggested bylaws for soaring clubs are available from the Soaring Society of America.

E. Officer Requirements

A small club starting out may have requirements only for a President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer, perhaps combining the latter. If it is intended that the club grow in size, thought should be given to formation of an executive committee with powers to act for the club, and provision for such posts as Operations and Maintenance Officers.

F. Membership Arrangements

There are two types of general arrangements under which a club may be organized. First, a club may be organized as a closed entity with a fixed number of members. Shares in the club can then be bought and sold at a price roughly equivalent to one member's portion of the total club assets. The club may have the privilege of confiscation of the share of a member for nonpayment of debts, and it can be resold to a new member.

The second arrangement possible is for open-ended type. In an open organization there is no upper limit to the membership. Initiation fees can be assigned to the purchase of more capital equipment to keep up with the growing demand. This arrangement is probably more satisfactory for soaring clubs because transient type members will leave their initiation fees behind, hence the club has the money whether or not the new members stay, and an automatic capitalization method is supplied.

III. Finances

The establishment of realistic financial arrangements is one of the most important items in the organization of any property-owning club.

The sailplane-owning club may choose to have three primary sources of income: initiation fees, dues, and flying charges. The club will have three primary types of expenses: purchase of capital equipment, fixed expenses occurring whether or not flying is done, and operating expenses of various pieces of equipment. In order to keep the club solvent and provide for future expansion, the dues should be adjusted to be slightly above the fixed expenses. The flying charges should be sufficient to pay for equipment maintenance (including fabric and engine overhaul) and the replacement of tow wires, ropes, etc., as well as the usual operating costs. The initiation fees of new members should be used for new capital equipment to support these members. Money received for future maintenance such as fabric replacement and towplane engine majors must be accounted for and banked in order to insure its availability when needed. Accurate account should be kept of money assigned to each category.

Host clubs start out with a relatively small number of people pooling their money to buy a sailplane --for instance, ten people at $1,000 a piece to get a $10,000 secondhand sailplane. It is suggested that future initiation fees be set at considerably less than the $1,000 a share of the first ten members. For instance, a $500 initiation fee (assuming the open type club) can be charged in order to encourage more people to join. The club could consider that it owed the original ten members $500 a piece to be repaid when the club was able. The initiation fees of the ten subsequent incoming members would be set aside for that purpose.

In computing the club fixed expenses, it is recommended that depreciation or capital equipment improvement be included as a real expense. Most clubs find that about 10% of the club capital worth per year must be assumed for the replacement and improvement of existing equipment. This is over and above the usual fabric replacement and engine major overhaul costs. Hull and liability insurance for sailplanes, trailers and tow vehicles should be included in annual budgeting. Insurance requirements for pilot/club members should be determined and made plain in either bylaws or on the membership form or in the club's printed procedures manual.

Detailed accounting procedures should be sought after by contacting a local accounting firm.

It is suggested that the club plan on being a Chapter of the Soaring Society of America, giving both the club members and the club the advantages of SSA membership. Affiliation as an SSA Chapter can easily be done by including SSA dues in the club dues. The club can then make the total payment annually to SSA. A club with Chapter status will receive a partial rebate from SSA on dues received in this manner for all members that are Full members of SSA. Please contact the SSA office for full details on becoming Chapter affiliated.

IV. Choice of Equipment

An open-ended club needs a two-place training sailplane. There are available some serviceable older ships for a very reasonable cost. These would include the TG-2, TG-3, LK-10, Pratt-Read and Schweizer 2-22. Their age may dictate that more attention be given to upkeep and maintenance and allowance made for fewer improvements found in current-production training

sailplanes. Other ships may lack ease of assembly, good visibility or comfort for the instructor and ease of flight controls, Their cost may run from $2,500 to $7,000 depending on condition, instrumentation and availability of a trailer. Also available are the Blanik L-13, Lark I5-28B2, and the Schweizer 2-33. All are newer, metal construction ships designed as trainers and readily available around the country from $8,000 to $15,000. Fiberglass European built two-place ships are readily available now and offer many nice features, low maintenance, good visibility, nicely balanced controls, pilot comforts, ease of rigging and assembly. The cost can be a serious consideration for a newly formed club as prices can run from $20,000 to $30,000. Ship types include AS-K 21, DG-200, Grob Twin II and Scheibe SF 26. All these sailplanes can be found in the classified or display advertisements in SOARING Magazine.

Winches can be built rather cheaply by a few skilled mechanics. Several articles on winches have appeared in past issues of **SOARING** Magazine.

For auto-towing, tension meters can be devised to provide optimum towing. These also have been discussed in past issues of **SOARING**. A good reference for ground launching procedures is Chapter 3 of the American Soaring Handbook available from the SSA.

Towplanes: Many types of aircraft are used as towplanes. The basic requirement of the tow aircraft is that it be able to climb at a speed well under the limit tow speed of the sailplane being towed. In general, aircraft with plenty of power and a light wing loading are used. These can include Waco UPF7's, Stearmans, Aeronca Sedans and Cessna 170's. Probably the most satisfactory is the Piper Super Cub. Popular towplanes now include Decathalons, Scouts, Piper Pawnees, Cessna 150/150 s, 172 s, 182 s, Maules, the French Rallye and the Czech Wilga. At least one club has installed Continental 85 h.p. and Lycoming 115 h.p. engines in Piper J-3 airframes for towplane use.

For a club starting up, it might be best to consider renting a towplane from a local airport operator, who can easily install a towhook on any suitable aircraft he might operate. Towhooks for towplanes are available from Schweizer Aircraft Corporation.

Facilities: The problem of flying facilities is a serious one for most clubs. Many airport operators feel sailplane operations interfere with the other activities, and therefore tend to discourage them. For airplane tow operations, a 3,000 ft. runway length is usually adequate although it does depend on many things such as the altitude of the field, and characteristics of the towplane and sailplane. Winch operations can be held in most any field of reasonable smoothness and length (3,000 ft. or more). Winch operations near operating power runways are frowned upon, however, because of the inherent dangers of long cables suspended in the air. Auto towing requires essentially the same type facility as winch towing, plus a tow car, generally more length (preferably 5,000 ft.) and smoothness is desired. Members' cars can be used until the club is able to afford it’s own equipment.

V. Operations

Most beginning clubs will find operational requirements to be separated into two types: instruction flights and strictly pleasure flying. The club operation may be organized to integrate both of these activities into each day's flying or they may be separated. Care must be taken to provide for both needs in the organization of flying operations.

The most critical shortage on the roster of a newly organized club is likely to be sailplane instructors. The most common source of instructors is the ranks of the commercially rated power instructor pilots in the club. If there is no sailplane instructor in the club, it is highly recommended that the most qualified member or members visit another club or a soaring school to get checked out in the techniques of flying and soaring sailplanes. Lists of the various clubs in your area and the schools in the U.S. may be obtained from the SSA.

Towplane pilots can be readily developed from power pilots. It is generally recommended that only commercial pilots be permitted to fly towplanes. Refer to Federal Aviation Regulation 61.69 for towing experience and instruction requirements. Power pilots who are also current in sailplanes make better tow pilots because they have a feel for the situation occurring behind them in the sailplane.

Training is much more efficiently accomplished (if it is done on a continuing basis) if the training procedure is organized, if goals are written down, and if specified accomplishments are asked of the student before solo. One club requires the student to be completely familiar with winch operation, aircraft assembly, tow car operation and other pertinent operation items before solo. These items are then signed off in a training notebook by an instructor. Operations rules are needed to keep the flying safe and fun. The rules should be written and distributed so all members have no excuse for non-familiarity with them.

VI. Equipment Maintenance

Many clubs start out assuming they will do a majority of their own aircraft maintenance to keep costs down. As a result of experience, it is recommended that all but routine "clean-up" maintenance be done professionally. It will be found that for very little increase in dues, the club will be considerably happier. Also, the equipment will miss fewer weekends of flying activity and interest will be maintained at a higher level. It may well prove more profitable to have the maintenance done commercially, as well as being completed faster and easier.