



# Mission Assistant Handbook

Pilot using their skills for the greater good!

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 [www.skyhope.org](http://www.skyhope.org)

## **What is SkyHope?**

SkyHope arranges free air transportation through our network of volunteer pilots for individuals requiring medical diagnosis, treatment or follow up, for military personnel and their families, or for other compassionate and humanitarian purposes. We have a network of volunteer pilots who provide this service using their own or rented aircraft. All passengers must be ambulatory and have a financial need. In addition, SkyHope will arrange for ground transportation, when available, upon arrival at their destination airport to their treatment or housing facility or for their return. There is never a cost to the patient for the services provided and there is no limit to the number of flights an individual can request.

Generally, the individuals who utilize our services are receiving diagnosis, treatment or follow-up for various types of acute or chronic illnesses that make it either financially impossible or otherwise infeasible to use public, commercial, or private charter transportation.

SkyHope founders have extensive experience with volunteer flying. Among them, they have flown thousands of missions as pilot-in-command. Although the pilots donate their time, aircraft and all expenses without compensation, the organization needs to maintain a coordination center in order to connect people to pilots and oversee the missions. Our only sources of income to operate this center are private donations and grants.

SkyHope is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt public charity and a member of the Air Care Alliance.

## **What does it mean to be a SkyHope Mission Assistant?**

Mission Assistants are certificated pilots that do not otherwise meet our Command Pilot requirements. In many cases, Mission Assistants are working to build time to meet our Command Pilot requirements, or pilots that do not have access to their own aircraft (inclusive of CFIs, CFIs, corporate or airline pilots). Mission Assistants can provide help with radios, passenger comfort, and serve as an extra set of eyes and ears in the cockpit.

**Mission Assistants will not handle the aircraft flight controls during the passenger carrying leg of the mission except in the event of an emergency.**

Once you meet the requirements to serve as Command Pilot, updated Pilot Paperwork (logbook showing new total time, updated flight reviews, license, medical, and aircraft insurance) must be submitted to the office ([palsmail@skyhope.org](mailto:palsmail@skyhope.org)) and a Command Pilot orientation must be scheduled. To schedule an orientation, contact a Pilot Coordinator at [palsmail@skyhope.org](mailto:palsmail@skyhope.org).

For a complete list of Command Pilot requirements, please refer to the "For Pilots" section of the SkyHope website (<https://skyhope.org/volunteer-info-for-pilots>).

## **What is SkyHope's Territory?**

SkyHope covers flights with our volunteer pilots throughout the area east of the Mississippi River. Typical flight times in general aviation aircraft range from two to three hours per leg, covering 200-600 miles. Flights originating or terminating beyond our primary coverage area will be conducted by our member pilots, or in collaboration with our corporate, charter and commercial charitable aviation partners. In addition, we also coordinate with other similar organizations to provide you and the patients with a seamless travel itinerary.

## **What types of illnesses can I expect to encounter?**

Illnesses vary. Some patients have life threatening diseases, such as cancer or heart disease. Others have illnesses that require specialized treatment at distant locations due to the fact there may only be several specialists in the world that can help. Normally illnesses are non-communicable (cancer, heart disease, brain tumor, etc.), however, occasionally this is not the case. SkyHope pilots will be made aware of these types of situations, allowing the pilot to determine if he/she is still willing to fly the mission.

SkyHope requires patients who qualify for our assistance to be ambulatory, able to sit upright for the duration of the flight, and in need of very little assistance. In cases where more attention is needed, patients make arrangements to be accompanied by an attendant. If the patient is a child, we require an adult guardian to be present as well.

Rarely do passengers require oxygen, but in the case of those who do, personal oxygen bottles are not allowed unless the bottle carries a DOT certification for use aboard an aircraft. Some FBOs have oxygen available, and pilots with an approved oxygen system onboard the aircraft may, if they choose, make it available for patients. However, permission from the patient's physician must be obtained before either a rented or onboard system can be used.

## **How do you determine patient/passenger eligibility?**

Through our initial phone screening, subsequent paperwork and data collection, our staff does everything within reason to ensure that our passengers are truly in need of assistance through SkyHope. We require that all passengers have authorization from their medical provider to fly in an unpressurized aircraft, confirmation that passengers are ambulatory and able to enter/exit the aircraft with minimal assistance, are medically stable, and in need of specialized treatment that is not available at a nearby facility. In addition, the SkyHope staff verifies household income, and inquiries about criminal history. SkyHope has turned away violent offenders, with the safety of our volunteers in mind.

If at any point you feel that a passenger has gotten through the screening process, and may not have been truly in need, please contact our office immediately at 631-694-7257.

## **How do flights get arranged?**

Requests for assistance arise in a variety of ways: by phone, online through our missions database, or through social media. Requests might come from a potential passenger directly, or from one of the many medical facilities or social workers with whom SkyHope maintains relationships. Once the request has been received, our Mission Coordination staff will begin the process of intake, listing, assigning, and completing the flight request.

Once it is determined that the passenger is eligible for SkyHope services, the Mission Coordination staff will enter all the pertinent information into the mission database. From here, pilots can access a listing of available missions. A pilot can submit a request to fly a mission that meets his personal availability and aircraft capabilities. The request is then reviewed for approval by the SkyHope Mission Coordinators. Once assigned, the pilot is forwarded all necessary info, at which point they become the point person for the patient regarding the flight details.

Please note that airports are often negotiable, for example, if a mission is listed as departing from KBOS, you might request to use a less congested, suburban Boston airport instead. Don't hesitate to reach out to the Mission Coordinators with requests of this nature by calling the office, 631-694-7257, or emailing [missions@skyhope.org](mailto:missions@skyhope.org).

## **Who Pays for the Flights?**

Pilots are responsible for all mission costs. Some costs may be tax deductible for the pilot as a charitable donation. Some FBOs offer fuel discounts, and most airports waive landing and parking fees for pilots on SkyHope missions. SkyHope Mission Coordinators will send a request to FBOs asking them to waive fees where possible ahead of your flight.

The SkyHope office will arrange ground transportation unless the passenger(s) have made their own arrangements. The SkyHope pilot incurs no more expense than he or she would incur on an equivalent business or pleasure flight.

## **Can I deduct my flight expenses on my taxes?**

Yes, SkyHope is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt public charity and as such, contributions, including the costs of flying missions, are therefore deductible. Pilots can deduct direct, out-of-pocket expenses. If overnight lodging is required, that expense, along with meals, is also deductible. Accurate records must be maintained, including receipts, hours flown, destination, etc. For complete information regarding deductible items and documentation, pilots should consult a tax professional.

## **How will I be identified as a SkyHope Pilot?**

ID badges are not being distributed to Mission Assistants at this time. However, once you are actively flying on missions, you can submit a request to [palsmail@skyhope.org](mailto:palsmail@skyhope.org).

\*It is mandatory that the pilot and everyone else on board the aircraft must carry appropriate identification for airport security purposes, including at least one photo ID.

## **When can I start helping?**

The Mission Assistant onboarding process is simple! We will ask that you provide the following documents to our office to be kept on file:

- Copies of the last few pages of your logbook showing total hours
- Current FAA Pilot Certificate
- Current Medical Certificate

The documents can be provided via email ([palsmail@skyhope.org](mailto:palsmail@skyhope.org)).

In lieu of a full orientation (which is focused heavily on Command Pilot procedures), Mission Assistants are expected to review this handbook. MA's are encouraged to reach out to the Pilot Coordinator to go over any additional questions that may arise at [palsmail@skyhope.org](mailto:palsmail@skyhope.org).

Instructions for getting started and navigating our online missions database are included in the next section this handbook.

## **How do I know what missions are available for Mission Assistants?**

Mission Assistants can find opportunities on upcoming flights by logging into our online missions system.

When a mission is requested by a SkyHope Command Pilot, the Command Pilot will indicate whether or not he or she is able to take a Mission Assistant along for that particular flight. By doing so, it will place the mission in a special queue that Mission Assistants can review for flight opportunities.

All SkyHope members will receive periodic emails with available missions, however, this list is geared mainly towards Command Pilots.

## **Logging in to the system for the first time:**

When your application to be a Mission Assistant is processed, you will receive an email with your username and a link to set up your password. The direct URL to the missions database is <https://palservices.force.com/pilot/login>.

## **Finding Mission Assistant Opportunities:**

Once logged in, click on the "Pending" button to view all upcoming missions. Then select the "**Mission Assistant**" filter.

This will display a list of upcoming flights with Command Pilots assigned that are interested in having a Mission Assistant. The Command Pilot's contact information including phone number, email address and home base will be listed in the Volunteer block. You should contact that pilot directly to inquire about the flight. It is helpful to include a brief introduction about yourself and your aviation experience.

Mission Assistants should expect to depart from the Command Pilot's home airport on mission day to avoid additional repositioning legs. If you are trying to connect with SkyHope Command Pilots at or near your home airport, you can search for members using our Member Roster.

Mission departure times are critical to patients' medical appointments and linking flights. It is important that you arrive at the airport at the time established by the Command Pilot.

## **Using the SkyHope Member Roster:**

Click the "Roster" button found at the top of the screen.

Select your search parameters (Home Base, State, Area Code, etc.). You should also choose a Pilot Status of "Command Pilot".

This query will return a list of Active SkyHope Command Pilots with their contact information and previous flight history (number of flights flown, flights flown this year, aircraft information, etc.).

You can reach out to local pilots to inquire about teaming up on upcoming missions. It is suggested to connect with pilots via email with a brief introduction about yourself, your aviation experience, and your availability. If you are sending to a group of emails at once, ***please be sure to BCC multiple email addresses.***

Should you have any questions or recommendations please do not hesitate to contact the Pilot Coordinator at [palsmail@skyhope.org](mailto:palsmail@skyhope.org).

## **What happens in the event of cancelation?**

SkyHope believes in Safety First and therefore a pilot is free to, and should, decline/cancel any mission they feel they are unable to safely complete. Reasons for declining/canceling a flight could be personal health, scheduling, weather, or other personal reasons. Command Pilots are to make a go/no-go decision with regards to each assigned mission. SkyHope staff will never question as to why a flight is canceled; that is at the discretion of the Command Pilot.

In the event that pilots encounter an unexpected delay resulting in an overnight stay near an alternate or intermediate airport, SkyHope will cover the costs of lodging for the pilot and passengers. All mission cancelations and delays must be communicated to the mission coordinators immediately.

If a Mission Assistant needs to cancel, that should be communicated directly with the Command Pilot as soon as possible. Most likely this will not impact whether or not the mission will still go on, however consistent communication between Command Pilot and Mission Assistant is key in creating a positive mission experience for all parties involved.

## **Patient/Passenger Initial Contact**

The Command Pilot will handle all communication with the patient/passenger. Once the timing of the flight is confirmed, the Command Pilot will pass the details along to the Mission Assistant and communicate any changes to the mission leading up to time of departure - again, communication is key to creating a positive mission experience!

## **Flight Plan**

The Command Pilot will file a flight plan.

## **Medical Emergency in Flight**

**Patient Condition Changes in Flight:** Please remember that you are not expected to be a medical transport professional. Should the Pilot in Command decide that a patient/passenger is in need of immediate medical attention or their condition is in any way jeopardizing safety thereby necessitating priority handling by ATC, the PIC will make a decision to notify ATC of their intention to declare a Medical Emergency. ATC is there to help.

After declaring a Medical Emergency, you should expect to provide ATC with the nature of the emergency (brief description), where you might like to land (if you don't know ask ATC for assistance: nearest airport with runway length of xx feet, nearest airport with medical support, nearest airport with any emergency support).

ATC has a protocol to follow and may ask additional questions. If you have questions about Medical Emergency scenarios and/or training specific to pilot technique for handling such rare events, we encourage you to reach out to a suitable flight instructor.

## **Mission Photos & Comments**

### **Mission Photos:**

You will have likely taken photos. The SkyHope Mission Coordination Team appreciates your sending the photos for use on our website, social media pages, and in newsletters or other print material. Photos can be sent to our office via email at [missions@skyhope.org](mailto:missions@skyhope.org).

If the patient and other passengers (or guardian) did not initial the bottom portion of the Liability Release agreeing to photos, please do not take, send or post their photos.

### **Mission Comments:**

The SkyHope team continually strives to improve the mission experience for you as well as all those that touch the mission. Please provide comments like the following to the SkyHope Mission Coordinator, Pilot Coordinator and/or Director of Operations.

- Successes such as heartwarming, interesting and/or humorous anecdotes about your flight experience.
- Support needs for a patient/passenger who may have had significant physical, medical and/or behavioral issues during your mission. Please note to include anything that a future pilot might like or need to know before flight.
- Process or other items that would make future flights generally better for you, the patient/passenger(s), the FBO's, etc.
- Items that would improve the quality and/or efficiency of the interaction that you have with the Mission Coordinators.
- Changes to the online missions system that would make it more efficient and/or effective.

## **Pilot Proficiency & Safety**

The SkyHope Safety Committee encourages you to take advantage of many of the helpful services to both build and sustain pilot proficiency. Please visit the Training and Resources page of our website, under the "For Pilots" section, for helpful websites.

Additionally, we strongly encourage that you take the online course "Public Benefit Flying: Balancing Safety and Compassion" by the Air Safety Institute: <https://www.aopa.org/training-and-safety/online-learning/online-courses/public-benefit-flying>

If you have comments or questions for the SkyHope Safety Committee, please contact a SkyHope Pilot Coordinator at [missions@skyhope.org](mailto:missions@skyhope.org).

## **Contact Directory**

**Address:** SkyHope, 7110 Republic Airport, Farmingdale NY 11735

**Office Phone:** 631-694-7257 or 888-818-1231

**After Hours Cell:** 631-694-7257 x2

**Fax:** 631-994-3199

**General Email:** [info@skyhope.org](mailto:info@skyhope.org)

**Mission Coordination Email:** [missions@skyhope.org](mailto:missions@skyhope.org)

**Pilot Coordination Email:** [palsmail@skyhope.org](mailto:palsmail@skyhope.org)

## **YOUR NOTES:**