



Drone Exploring: Career Spotlights

Independent Contractor — Post

Overview: This session takes a serious, practical look at becoming an independent freelance drone operator: combining income streams like wedding and event videography, sports coverage, and personal or family projects into a small business. Explorers learn exactly what the FAA requires before anyone can legally get paid to fly a drone (Part 107 certification, aircraft registration, and Remote ID compliance), plus core small-business basics like insurance, contracts, and pricing, and build a simple freelance business plan.

OBJECTIVES

- Understand the FAA requirements that must be met before legally getting paid to operate a drone.
- Identify multiple income streams a freelance drone operator can combine: events (weddings, sports), personal or family projects, and local business gigs.
- Learn core small-business basics: insurance, contracts and releases, pricing, and taxes.
- Practice building a simple freelance business plan combining at least two service types.

SUPPLIES

- Laptop and projector to show sample freelance drone photography and videography portfolios
- Printed handouts: FAA Requirements to Get Paid Flying Drones and Freelance Drone Business Plan Worksheet
- Whiteboard or flip chart and markers
- Optional: a sample drone photography or videography contract or model release template

ADVISOR NOTES

- Be direct that flying for compensation without a Part 107 certificate is a federal violation with real fines. This isn't optional paperwork.
- Many real freelancers start part-time, combining drone work with another job, and grow their client base gradually.
- Discuss how insurance and contracts protect both the operator and the client. Many wedding venues and event organizers require proof of liability insurance before allowing a drone on site.
- Consider inviting a guest speaker who works as a freelance independent drone operator to share how they built their business. See Optional Extensions.
- If no guest speaker is available, Advisors can run the entire session using this outline, the FAA Requirements handout, and the resource links below.

SESSION OUTLINE

- **Welcome and Icebreaker** (10 min)
 - “What’s one hobby or skill you have that you think could turn into extra income someday, and how might a drone fit in?”
- **Regulatory Moment: What the FAA Requires to Get Paid** (15–20 min)
 - FAA Part 107 Remote Pilot Certificate: required for any drone flight done for compensation; minimum age 16; requires passing a knowledge test.
 - Aircraft Registration: any drone over 250 grams (including most camera drones) must be registered with the FAA through FAADroneZone for a \$5 fee, valid for 3 years.
 - Remote ID Compliance: Since 2023-2024, most drones must broadcast identification and location information in flight (like a digital license plate) either built into the drone or added with a broadcast module.
 - Operating Rules: Under Part 107, night flights and limited flights over people or moving vehicles are allowed without a special waiver, as long as the drone meets safety and remote ID requirements and the pilot has completed updated

recurrent training.

– **Mini-Lesson: Combining Income Streams** (15–20 min)

- Weddings and events: Standalone drone coverage often runs \$300-\$900, or \$200-\$500 when added to a full photo or video package; full-day event rates can run \$500-\$1,700 (established pros: \$1,500-\$4,000+).
- Sports and outdoor events: Festivals, races, and tournaments are often priced similarly to event work, as a half-day or full-day creative fee.
- Personal or family projects and local business promo work round out a freelancer's schedule between bigger events.
- Discuss why combining 2-3 service types creates more consistent income than relying on just one.

– **Mini-Lesson: Small Business Basics** (15 min)

- Liability insurance: A \$1 million drone liability policy averages around \$650/year (often under \$100/month) and is frequently required by venues and clients.
- Contracts and model and property releases protect both the freelancer and the client.
- Pricing, building a portfolio, and basic tax considerations (freelance income is generally reported as self-employment income).

– **Activity: Build a Freelance Business Plan** (20–25 min)

- Using the Freelance Drone Business Plan Worksheet, small groups choose 2-3 services to combine and plan pricing, required insurance and contracts, and how they'd find their first clients.

– **Wrap-Up Discussion** (10 min)

- Groups present their business plans.
- Discuss the concrete first steps (certification, registration, insurance, portfolio) needed to start.

REFLECTION SECTION

Advisor Note: Some sample questions are below. They are designed to help the participants apply what they have learned to their own interests. You are welcome to use these questions or develop your own.

Focusing Questions

- What surprised you about everything required before someone can legally get paid to fly a drone?
- Which combination of services (events, personal projects, local business work) sounds most realistic for you?

Analysis Questions

- Why do you think the FAA requires registration and Remote ID in addition to the Part 107 certificate?
- How does having insurance and a contract protect both the freelancer and the client?

Generalization Questions

- How is building a freelance business around a few combined skills like other small businesses you know of?
- What other careers require this same mix of a technical certification and business skills?

Challenge: This week, research one FAA Part 107 test-prep resource and the current FAADroneZone registration process and identify the concrete first steps you'd take to become certified.

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

Guest Speaker: Invite someone who works as a freelance or independent drone operator to share how they built their business and combine different types of work, in person or by video call.

Advisor-Led Option: If no guest speaker is available, Advisors can run the full session using this outline, the FAA Requirements handout, and the resource links below. No outside expert is required.

Resource Links: FAA Part 107 overview and FAADroneZone registration ([faa.gov/uas](https://www.faa.gov/uas)); FAA Remote ID information; Small Business Administration ([sba.gov](https://www.sba.gov)) resources on starting a freelance or sole-proprietor business.

Extension Project: Explorers who are 16 or older can begin studying for the actual Part 107 knowledge test and sketch out a real pricing sheet for their own future drone services.

Handout: FAA Requirements to Get Paid Flying Drones

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Use this checklist to understand what's required before flying a drone for compensation.

1. FAA Part 107 Remote Pilot Certificate

Required for any paid drone flight; minimum age 16; requires passing an FAA knowledge test.

2. Aircraft Registration

Any drone over 250 grams must be registered through FAADroneZone for \$5, valid for 3 years.

3. Remote ID Compliance

Most drones must broadcast identification and location information in flight, via either built-in or added broadcast module.

4. Following Operating Rules

Night flights and limited flights over people are allowed under Part 107 without a special waiver if the drone and pilot meet current safety and training requirements.

5. Business Protections (Not Required by FAA, but Essential)

Liability insurance, signed contracts, and model and property releases protect both the operator and the client.

Handout: Freelance Drone Business Plan Worksheet

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Use this worksheet to plan a small freelance drone business combining 2-3 services.

Service Offered	Target Client	Estimated Price	Insurance or Contract Needed