



Center of Excellence Will Help Unmanned Aircraft Systems Integrate Safely



with each COE core member university. The institutions selected will be required to match federal research grants.

“Once selected, this center will be tasked with a variety of research initiatives to support the safe and efficient integration of UAS into our airspace,” said Edward Bolton, Assistant Administrator for NextGen, whose office oversees all of the FAA’s COEs. “At the same time, the universities and their affiliates will be preparing and educating a pool of professionals to serve the aviation community in the future.”

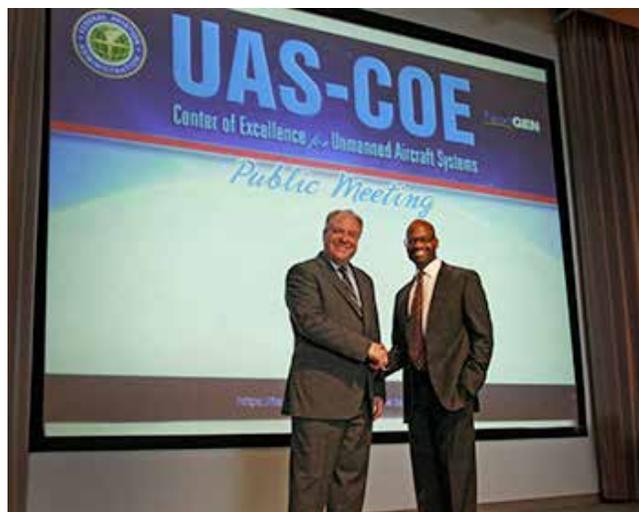
The use of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) in civil airspace raises many technical, policy and procedure questions. To better understand how the aircraft can be integrated into the National Airspace System, the FAA is setting up a center of excellence (COE).

Last month in Leesburg, Va., 100 representatives from more than 60 universities along with 200 government and industry officials attended a two-day FAA public meeting to hear about plans for the newest COE. Centers of excellence are established to conduct research and training on specific aviation issues identified to maintain a safe and efficient air transportation system.

The FAA has seven other university COEs studying issues such as commercial space, general aviation, alternative jet fuels and environment.

A draft solicitation for the COE for UAS has been released. Plans are for a final one to be issued in August with university proposals due in September. The FAA will initially enter into a five-year cooperative agreement

Congress directed the FAA to establish a UAS COE under the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014. The new COE will be jointly managed by the FAA’s NextGen and UAS Integration offices.



(L-R) James H. Williams, manager of the FAA’s UAS Integration Office and Edward Bolton, Assistant Administrator for NextGen.

“We are the agency focal point for all things UAS, including research and development (R&D) and processing of operational authorizations,” said James H. Williams, manager of the FAA’s UAS Integration Office. “Through this partnership with NextGen, my office will specify and define research requirements needed for UAS integration.”



James H. Williams, manager of the FAA’s UAS Integration Office,

The UAS COE team is being led by Sabrina Saunders-Hodge, manager of NextGen’s R&D Integration Division. She also serves as the NextGen UAS R&D portfolio manager.

“We rely heavily on our collaboration with government, industry and academic partners not only to expand our R&D bandwidth, but also to refine the requirements and answer the questions necessary to safely and efficiently integrate UAS into the NAS,” she said.

The FAA manages the COE effort from the William J. Hughes Technical Center in Atlantic City, N.J. Patricia Watts of the NextGen organization is the National Program Director of the FAA Air Transportation Centers of Excellence there and she also serves as the COE grants officer.

“A COE like the one on UAS will enhance FAA access to university research capabilities and products by awarding single and multiyear research grants to colleges, universities

and affiliate organizations that have aviation and aerospace expertise in a variety of disciplines,” Watts said. “The UAS COE will not only provide access to a world-class team of scientists in the UAS community but also coordinate activities to achieve common goals while avoiding duplication of effort.”

Exactly how the new COE will interact with six UAS test sites that the FAA selected last December will be determined once the COE team is in place and develops its detailed research plans. The agency expects any flight testing the COE wants to perform will occur at one or more of the test sites.

The draft solicitation for this new COE for UAS can be found at www.faa.gov/go/coe.



Patricia Watts of the NextGen organization is the National Program Director of the FAA Air Transportation Centers of Excellence.