

DroneForce Indiana clears a new runway for young talent – powered by IAAQLI support

Writer: Dennis Jarrett

A new workforce pathway is taking flight in Indianapolis, and it's built for young people who have historically been left out of the aviation conversation.

DroneForce Indiana, founded by Darrell Morton Jr., has launched a new initiative that will train and prepare young adults to become FAA-certified drone pilots, with funding support provided through the Indianapolis African American Quality of Life Initiative (IAAQLI) grant program. The goal is straightforward: create real, career access in a fast-growing industry—while changing who gets to see themselves in it.

“DroneForce Indiana is...a passion project for me,” Morton said. “I saw the need in the aviation industry to interest minorities because, as it stands out—especially amongst pilots—it’s 90% white male.”

Morton’s approach is both strategic and personal. He started with drones during the COVID era—“I’m self-taught,” he explained—and as he studied where the industry was headed, he noticed a gap: students were excited, but often didn’t have the early exposure to aviation language, concepts, and confidence-building experiences that lead to long-term success.

The new IAAQLI-supported program—called “Streets to the Skies”—is designed for youth and young adults ages 16–24. The plan is to run four cohorts of 25 participants

over two years, reaching 100 trained participants and placing them on a direct path toward certification and employment.

The primary outcome is earning the FAA Part 107 credential, the industry standard required for most commercial drone work. “It’s an opportunity to get a win,” Morton said. “You have a credential.

Just as important, DroneForce is building readiness beyond the exam—hands-on flight training, confidence development, and an emphasis on responsibility and professionalism. “When you’re flying in federal airspace with other planes, helicopters...that can be intimidating,” Morton said. “We want to make sure our cohorts understand...this is serious business.”

Morton says the IAAQLI grant

support is critical because it allows DroneForce to deliver training at the quality and scale the moment requires. “The funding is absolutely essential,” he said, “to get the proper tools... help with the learning process...take them from knowing very little and in a four-week time frame give them the necessary information and confidence to pass the exam.”

For Morton, the larger mission is representation and opportunity—creating a visible, local pathway into drones, aviation, and aerospace for young people who may never have considered it. “This is the future,” he said. “With the resources we were provided, this really helps us speed up the process and get the message into the community: this is an opportunity for you—and for the young people in your family.”

Learn more: DroneForceIndiana.com (look for the “Streets to the Skies” initiative and cohort information).



Darrell Morton and Student