

Airport Manager interview questions

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What to expect

The interview for an Airport Manager role typically assesses your operational expertise, safety and regulatory knowledge, commercial acumen, and leadership capabilities. Expect a mix of technical, behavioural, and scenario-based questions.

- **Technical and regulatory:** Questions that probe your knowledge of airport operations, safety management systems, and regulations from bodies like CASA.
- **Operational scenario:** Questions that present a real-world disruption or challenge and ask how you would handle it.
- **Behavioural:** Questions that ask you to give examples of past experiences, especially in leadership, stakeholder management, and negotiation.
- **Commercial:** Questions about budgeting, contract negotiation, and lease management.

The interview process usually involves a panel interview with the airport's senior leadership, HR, and sometimes a technical expert. It may include a presentation or a written exercise. Questions tend to move from your background and technical knowledge to scenario-based problems and behavioural examples. You may also have a separate meeting with key stakeholders such as airline representatives or the board.

1. Can you describe your experience managing terminal and airside operations to keep flights on schedule?

Why they ask

The interviewer wants to understand your operational expertise and ability to coordinate complex, time-sensitive activities.

How to structure your answer

Start with an overview of your typical responsibilities, then walk through a specific example where you improved on-time performance. Finish with the outcome and what you learned.

Example answer

"In my previous role as Operations Manager at a regional airport, I was responsible for daily terminal and airside operations. One of my key achievements was overhauling our turnaround coordination process. I introduced a daily briefing with airlines and ground handlers to align on priorities and potential bottlenecks. As a result, we reduced average turnaround delays, and our on-time departure rate improved noticeably. I also worked closely with air traffic control to optimise slot usage. This experience taught me the value of proactive communication and data sharing."

2. Tell me about a time you had to manage a major disruption, such as severe weather or a security incident.

Why they ask

This assesses your ability to stay calm under pressure, make decisions, and coordinate across teams during a crisis.

How to structure your answer

Use the STAR method: describe the situation, the task you faced, the actions you took, and the result. Focus on your specific role and decision-making.

Example answer

"During a severe storm, a lightning strike forced the closure of our main runway for several hours. As the duty airport manager, I immediately activated our emergency operations centre. I coordinated with

air traffic control to divert incoming flights, worked with ground handlers to secure equipment, and communicated regularly with airlines and terminal staff to manage passenger expectations. I also ensured that safety inspections were carried out promptly once the storm passed. We reopened the runway safely within a few hours, and there were no injuries or significant damage. The incident highlighted the importance of clear communication and following our emergency procedures."

3. How do you balance safety and regulatory compliance with commercial pressures?

Why they ask

The interviewer is probing your judgement and ability to integrate safety, compliance, and commercial goals.

How to structure your answer

Explain your philosophy first, then give a concrete example where you had to make a trade-off or find a win-win solution.

Example answer

"I believe safety and compliance are non-negotiable foundations for any airport operation. However, I also understand that commercial viability is essential. In my experience, the two are not mutually exclusive. For example, when negotiating a new lease with a retail tenant, I ensured that all safety and security requirements were built into the contract from the start. This avoided costly retrofits later and kept the tenant compliant. I also work closely with our safety team to identify efficiencies that don't compromise standards, such as streamlining passenger screening without reducing security. By treating safety as a core value, we maintain our licence to operate and our reputation."

4. Describe your experience negotiating leases or landing fees with airlines or tenants.

Why they ask

This tests your commercial acumen and ability to manage key stakeholder relationships.

How to structure your answer

Outline your approach to negotiation, then give an example of a successful outcome. Highlight how you balanced the airport's interests with the other party's needs.

Example answer

"I approach negotiations by first understanding the other party's priorities and constraints. When I negotiated a new landing fee agreement with a low-cost carrier, I knew they were cost-sensitive but also valued operational reliability. I proposed a tiered fee structure that rewarded growth while ensuring a minimum revenue guarantee for the airport. I also offered improved turnaround coordination to help them maintain their schedule. The agreement was mutually beneficial, and the airline increased its frequency over the following year. This experience taught me that successful negotiations require creativity and a focus on long-term relationships."

5. How do you lead and roster a multidisciplinary team to ensure operational coverage?

Why they ask

This assesses your leadership and resource management skills.

How to structure your answer

Explain your leadership style and rostering principles, then give an example of how you've managed a team effectively.

Example answer

"I lead by setting clear expectations and empowering my team to make decisions within their areas. When rostering, I consider operational demand, individual skills, and fair work practices. In my current

role, I introduced a rolling roster that aligned with peak flight times and allowed for cross-training between terminal and airside teams. This reduced overtime costs and improved our ability to respond to disruptions. I also hold regular team meetings to gather feedback and address concerns. The result was a more flexible and engaged workforce, with lower turnover."

6. What experience do you have with airport management systems like SITA or AODB?

Why they ask

This checks your technical proficiency with the tools that support airport operations.

How to structure your answer

Describe your familiarity with the systems, then give an example of how you've used them to improve operations.

Example answer

"I have used SITA Airport Management and AODB extensively in my current role. These systems are critical for monitoring flight schedules, resource allocation, and passenger flow. For instance, I used the AODB to identify a recurring bottleneck in baggage handling during peak periods. By analysing the data, I worked with the ground handler to adjust staffing and equipment deployment, which reduced baggage delivery times. I also use Power BI to create dashboards for senior management, giving them real-time visibility of key performance indicators. I am comfortable learning new systems and have trained staff on their use."