



FOR OPERATORS & FLIGHT DEPARTMENTS

The AOG Response Playbook

How to get a grounded aircraft back in service fast, and how to build the response before the call ever comes.

INTRODUCTION

Minutes Are the Asset

An aircraft on ground is the most expensive thing in aviation that is not moving. Every hour a jet sits broken, it burns crew time, repositioning, and missed revenue, and in charter or cargo work it burns contractual penalties and a customer deciding whether to call you again. The repair is rarely the long part. The wait is.

The gap between a six-hour AOG and a three-day one is almost never the wrench time. It is how fast the right diagnosis, the right part, and the right person reach the aircraft. Those three things are decided long before the warning light comes on, by who you have on call and how ready they are.

This guide lays out how a grounded aircraft actually loses time, what to do in the first hour, and how to stand up an AOG response that holds at two in the morning when the aircraft is far from home. It is written for the people who answer for dispatch reliability: owners, flight departments, charter and cargo operators, and the managers who carry the schedule.

Sage-Popovich has worked aviation assets since 1979. Through our maintenance arm, TOGS Aircraft, we run a 24/7 AOG desk and an FAA Part 145 repair station at Gary Chicago International Airport (GCIA), with a deep parts inventory behind it. This playbook is drawn from that work.

WHERE THE HOURS GO

Anatomy of an AOG

Pull apart a long AOG and the actual repair is usually a small slice of it. The hours stack up in three places: figuring out what is wrong, finding the part, and getting qualified hands and the right tooling to the aircraft.

Diagnosis comes first and is the most underrated. A vague squawk, an intermittent fault, or a fault that reads one way and is caused by another sends crews chasing the wrong fix. Time spent confirming the real failure is rarely wasted. Time spent guessing always is.

Parts are where most AOGs actually live. The component is identified quickly, then the clock runs while someone hunts a serviceable unit, confirms it fits the configuration, and gets it moving. A part that is two days out is a two-day AOG, no matter how good the mechanic is.

Logistics close the gap. The right technician, the right tooling, and the part all have to arrive at the same ramp, sometimes far from any major station, sometimes at night, sometimes across a border. Coordinating that in parallel rather than one step at a time is the whole game.

Read in that order, the lesson is plain. AOG duration is set less by the difficulty of the fix than by the speed of the supply chain and the depth of the bench behind it.

THE FIRST HOUR

Triage in Parallel

The first hour sets the timeline. The instinct is to work the problem one step at a time, diagnose, then find a part, then call for help. That sequence is how a one-day AOG becomes three.

Run it in parallel instead. The moment an aircraft is confirmed down, secure it, confirm the squawk against the actual fault, and start three lines at once: sourcing the likely part, lining up the qualified labor and tooling, and checking whether the defect can be deferred under the minimum equipment list while a permanent fix is arranged.

Deferral is the most overlooked move. A defect that can be addressed under the minimum equipment list may let the aircraft reposition to a station with the parts and people to fix it properly, turning a stranded AOG into a planned event. It is a judgment call that has to be made by someone qualified, early, before the aircraft is committed to sitting.

The other early task is information. Get the records, the configuration, and the current status in front of whoever is sourcing the part, so the unit that ships is the unit that fits. A large share of parts delays come from sending the wrong thing quickly.

THE LONG POLE

The Parts Problem

If one thing decides AOG duration, it is parts. A grounded aircraft waiting on a single component is the most common picture in the hangar, and the most avoidable.

Three things shorten it. The first is knowing your failure profile, the components on your fleet that fail often or strand the aircraft when they do, and arranging access to those before you need them. The second is depth of inventory, a real shelf of serviceable units and the broker relationships to find what is not on it. The third is the paperwork to use a used-serviceable part with confidence, with traceability a buyer, lessor, or auditor will accept later.

Exchange and loaner programs matter here too. A serviceable unit on the aircraft today, with the failed one sent out for repair against it, gets the schedule back before the repair is even finished. That only works when the partner has the unit on hand.

Sage-Popovich holds a 55,000 square foot temperature-controlled parts warehouse in Valparaiso, Indiana, carrying more than 250,000 line items, with the broker network to reach what is not on the shelf. When an AOG comes down to a part, that depth is the difference between hours and days.

QUALIFIED HANDS

Boots on the Ground

A diagnosis and a part still leave the hardest logistics problem: getting qualified people and the right tooling to the aircraft, wherever it came down.

Good AOG response is built around reach. A repair station that can mobilize a technician, send the tooling, and coordinate the part to land at the same ramp turns a remote AOG into a routine one. The alternative, waiting to ferry an aircraft to a home base it may not be legal to fly to, costs days.

Certification is not optional here. Whoever signs the work has to be authorized to return the aircraft to service, with the ratings that cover the airframe, the engines, and the avionics involved. A fast fix that cannot be signed off is not a fix.

Through TOGS Aircraft, our FAA Part 145 repair station at Gary Chicago International Airport, certificate O8GR668X, Sage-Popovich runs a 24/7 AOG desk and a mobile response that drives to grounded aircraft across the region, backed by inspections, heavy checks, avionics work, and the parts inventory to move on short notice.

AFTER THE FIX

Done Right, Not Just Fast

Speed that creates a records gap is a false economy. The fastest fix in the world costs you later if the logbook entry is thin, the part has no traceability, or the return to service will not hold up when the aircraft is sold, leased, or audited.

Every AOG repair should close clean: a proper logbook entry, the return-to-service sign-off by an authorized person, and full traceability on any part installed, especially a used-serviceable unit. That paper protects the aircraft's value and your dispatch record at the same time.

This is where an AOG partner who also lives on the value side of aviation earns its keep. The same documentation discipline that satisfies an FAA inspector is what a future buyer, lessor, or lender will demand. Getting it right once, at the time of repair, is far cheaper than reconstructing it later.

Sage-Popovich works both sides of that line. We return aircraft to service through TOGS, and we value, recover, and remarket the same aircraft across the industry, so we document an AOG repair the way the people who later judge the asset expect.

BEFORE YOU NEED ONE

Choosing an AOG Partner

01 A desk that answers, 24/7

AOGs do not keep business hours. Confirm there is a real person who can triage and mobilize at any hour, not a voicemail and a callback in the morning.

02 Parts depth, not just a catalog

Ask what is actually on the shelf and how fast it ships. A deep inventory plus a broker network beats a long list of part numbers nobody stocks.

03 Certification that covers your aircraft

The partner must be authorized to return your airframe, engines, and avionics to service. A fix that cannot be signed off is not a fix.

04 Diagnostic depth

Most AOG time is lost confirming the real fault. Look for technical depth that gets the diagnosis right the first time, not a parts cannon.

05 Logistics that move in parallel

The part, the tooling, and the technician should be sourced at once, not in sequence. Ask how they coordinate all three to one ramp.

06 Records and traceability

Confirm every repair closes with a clean logbook entry and full traceability, so the work holds up under audit and at resale.

07 Status you can see

You should know where the part is and when the aircraft will fly. Confirm you get straight, frequent updates, not silence until it is done.

08 A relationship before the event

The best AOG outcomes are set up in advance. Put the agreement, the contacts, and the parts access in place before the warning light comes on.

WHY SAGE-POPOVICH

Built to Answer the Call

Sage-Popovich has worked aviation assets since 1979. Through TOGS Aircraft, our FAA Part 145 repair station at Gary Chicago International Airport (GCIA), we run a 24/7 AOG desk, dispatch a mobile service that drives to grounded aircraft across the region, and perform inspections, heavy checks, and avionics work, with the parts and logistics to move on short notice. A second hangar comes online at GCIA in late September, adding capacity for scheduled and heavy inspections alongside AOG work.

Three things set our AOG response apart. The first is parts. We hold a 55,000 square foot temperature-controlled warehouse in Valparaiso, Indiana, carrying more than 250,000 line items, with the broker network to reach what is not on the shelf. The second is depth. We have spent four decades on aircraft of every kind, so the diagnosis is right early and the fix holds. The third is the long view. Because we also value, recover, and remarket aircraft across the industry, we document every repair the way the people who later judge the asset expect.

For an operator, that combination means an aircraft back in service faster, signed off clean, and worth what it should be when the time comes to sell or lease it. One team answers the call and stays accountable from the first squawk to the return to service.



Let's talk.

Set up your AOG response before you need it. Tell us your fleet and your routes, and we will put the parts access, the contacts, and the plan in place so the next grounded aircraft is a short story.

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