

American Avalanche Association Professional Training Program Structure and Oversight

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM

To promote excellence and consistency in U.S. professional avalanche training, the American Avalanche Association (A3) coordinates and oversees the Professional Training Program. This program has been built through a collaborative process with avalanche education providers, as well as industry advisors, and outside consultants. Through continued hard work and collaboration, the A3, educators, industry and other stakeholders work to develop and maintain the highest level of training, preparing individuals for the workplace with clear skills and a focus on worker safety. There are five main avenues through which the A3 helps to promote course quality and consistency within the Pro Training Program: the A3 Pro Course Provider review process, defined Pro Trainer Qualifications, development, facilitation, and administration of A3 Pro Trainer Workshops, defined In-House Training Guidelines, and the specific Course Guidelines and Proficiencies. Four of these critical components are detailed in this document (Course Provider review, Pro Trainer qualifications, administration of the A3 Pro Trainer Workshop, and In-House Training guidelines).

AMERICAN AVALANCHE ASSOCIATION PERSONNEL

Executive Director: Works collaboratively with the Professional Education Manager and the Chair of the Education Committee to determine details, updates, and budget projections related to the oversight and administration of the Professional Training Program. Serves as point of contact for communication by course providers and trainers in the absence of the Pro Education Manager. Consults on program specifics as needed.

Education Committee Chair: Program lead for the recreational avalanche training program. Facilitates coordination between the recreational and professional training programs. Serves as a member of the Industry Advisory Group representing Avalanche Education. Consults on program specifics as needed.

Professional Education Manager (PEM): A3 program lead for the Pro Training Program. The PEM works with course providers and industry to develop and implement A3-led instructor training. The PEM serves as the primary point of contact for professional course providers and trainers. She/he is responsible for working collaboratively with course providers, with input from the IAG on any updates for professional courses. The PEM serves as the facilitator of the Industry Advisory Group. The PEM is responsible for the organization and implementation of course provider reviews and pro training workshops.

Supplemental Staff: Additional staff may be hired to assist in specific program-related tasks as deemed appropriate by the Executive Director and Pro Education Manager.

Industry Advisory Group for Education (IAG): The IAG advises the A3 on desired worker outcomes and helps inform educators on necessary professional skills. The purpose of the IAG is to assist and advise the A3 Staff, Board of Directors (BOD), and Pro Course Provider Alliance on topics related to developing

and implementing the A3's education programs and to ensure such programs are consistent with the industry standards and serve the needs of avalanche professionals and their employers.

The IAG is composed of eight active avalanche professionals selected to represent all segments of the industry, pertinent geographical regions of the country, with broad understanding of the snow and avalanche industry. Details about the IAG can be seen [here](#).

PROFESSIONAL COURSE PROVIDERS

The A3 Pro Training Program formally launched with initial course offerings from Providers proceeding through the review process during the 2017/18 winter season. The inaugural cohort of Pro Course Providers includes Alaska Avalanche School, American Avalanche Institute, American Institute for Avalanche Research and Education, Colorado Mountain College Leadville, National Avalanche School, and Silverton Avalanche School, which make up the Course Provider Alliance. These six Pro Course Providers are responsible for teaching the following professional courses: Pro 1 and Pro 2.

Professional Course Providers must meet certain requirements and successfully complete a rigorous review process with the A3 for approval to teach A3 recognized Pro Training Courses. Course Provider requirements are summarized below; further specific details are found in the *Skills and Proficiencies* documents and in the *Course Provider Agreement*. The Course Provider review process is described below; details of review standards and criteria reside in the *CP Review Checklist and Grading Sheet* document. Professional Course Provider requirements and the Course Provider review process help maintain quality and consistency within the A3 Pro Training Program.

Overview of Course Provider Requirements

In joining the A3 Pro Training Program, the Course Provider agrees to:

- Teach Pro Courses consistent with or exceeding the standards described in the relevant course *Skills and Proficiencies* document.
- Engage productively in collaboration with the A3 Course Provider Alliance.
- Offer reciprocity for other Pro Providers' courses when assessing student prerequisites.
- Update its curricula based on a collaborative process between the A3 and professional course providers and including recommendations from the IAG.
- Maintain courses staffed by appropriately qualified instructors (see trainer qualifications below).
- Have (or have access to) appropriate permits to operate field sessions in terrain that allows the provider to meet course outcomes and assess defined proficiencies.
- Maintain a comprehensive, documented risk management plan.
- Have access to supporting training elements to effectively meet course outcomes (remote data collection, terrain access, access to other pro entities for guest lecturers/operational exposure).
- Sign an agreement defining its relationship with the A3, including specific legal requirements, and stating its commitment to provide quality professional training and fair student assessments.

COURSE PROVIDER APPROVAL PROCESS

A3 will not be accepting new Course Providers until **at least** the winter of **2023/24**, at which time, a more detailed review process will be available.

Review Process

The review process consists of the following steps: initial review of paperwork, provisional status, onsite review, and approved status. All current Course Providers successfully completed the approval process over the first two seasons of the Pro Program (2017/18 and 2018/19).

All reviews are conducted by at least two independent reviewers and overseen by the A3 Professional Education Manager. The initial review of paperwork ensures that course providers not only have the required curriculum to teach the program, but also have insurance, permits, dates for courses, and a staffing plan. The onsite review is a comprehensive and in-depth audit of the program in action. One independent A3 reviewer is present for the entire course and observes and evaluates the Provider's ability to teach, coach, and evaluate students on the skills and proficiencies outlined for that course. Once Course Provider's successfully complete these steps, they achieve approved Course Provider status.

The Course Provider may be subject to ongoing observations of its course(s) to ensure continuing course quality and consistency. Specific parameters of potential additional reviews are detailed in the *Pro Course Provider Agreement*.

Course Provider Fees

Initial and on-site review fees are variable and based on actual costs to the A3 for a given Provider's review process. This fee includes initial review of application, syllabus, and staff, the on-site observation by an A3 Reviewer (wages, lodging, food, travel), and post-review follow up by A3 staff. The Provider is responsible for paying these costs.

Course Provider Confidentiality

All materials submitted to the A3 for review by the team will remain confidential and be retained for the purposes of the review process only. The A3 will strive to avoid all conflicts of interest within the review process. All course provider materials and information reviewed during the course provider approval process are proprietary to the course provider and will not be distributed or shared by the A3 or by A3 reviewers without explicit written consent of the course provider.

PRO COURSE CERTIFICATES AND A3 MEMBERSHIP

The Provider is responsible for issuing a course certificate that includes the A3 logo and reference to the Pro Training Program to every student who successfully completes a Pro Training course. The A3 requests that all Course Providers encourage each of their Pro course students to be or become current members of the A3. The A3 will provide supporting membership materials to Providers for distribution to students upon enrollment and during their Pro Training course. The A3 will note successful Pro course completion within the A3 database for any current member at the request of either the Provider or the student. A3 membership helps support the A3 in achieving the overall goals of the A3 Pro Training Program - high quality, consistent professional avalanche training opportunities in the United States.

RELATED PROGRAM CONSIDERATIONS

American Mountain Guides Association (AMGA) and Scope of Practice

Ski Guide Terrain, as covered by the AMGA Scope of Practice (SOP), may be relevant to instructors and guides teaching avalanche courses. The AMGA SOP exists to “promote safety, quality of experience, and the public interest by establishing training and certification standards... [that] elevate the guiding profession.” The SOP exists for educational purposes and will be mandatory for AMGA Professional Members and AMGA accredited businesses starting January 1, 2022. For further details including definitions of Apprentice Ski Guide, Assistant Ski Guide, Ski Guide, as well as supervision specific to Ski Guide Terrain see the full [AMGA Scope of Practice](#) document.

The A3 acknowledges the existence of the AMGA Scope of Practice and AMGA SOP considerations when determining recognition of successful Pro 2 course completion for guides progressing through the AMGA ski and/or alpine programs. As of December 2018, the AMGA will honor all A3 approved Pro 2 Course Providers.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINER QUALIFICATIONS

The following defined Pro Trainer qualifications help maintain quality and consistency within the A3 Pro Training Program.

- **Pro 1 Trainer:**
 - Professionalism
 - A3 professional member in good standing
 - Pro 2 Certificate or Equivalent (see Prior Learning Assessment)
 - Operational Experience
 - Minimum 7 winters (at least 140 days) of operational risk management

- Education
 - In-house training consistent w/ A3 recommendations
 - Experience instructing avalanche courses or trainings
 - Experience in a mentorship role
 - Current familiarity with Pro 1 curriculum
- **Pro 1 Lead Trainer**
 - All of the Above, plus:
 - Education
 - Attendance at a A3-run Pro Trainers Workshop
 - Experience
 - Minimum 7 winters (at least 140 days) operational risk management
 - Experience teaching Pro 1 curriculum
 - Fluent with evaluation criteria
- **Pro 2 Trainer**
 - Professionalism
 - A3 professional member in good standing
 - Pro 2 certificate or equivalent
 - Operational Experience
 - Minimum 10 winter seasons (at least 200 days) operational risk management
 - Education
 - In-house training consistent with A3 requirements
 - Experience in a mentorship role
 - Experience instructing avalanche courses or trainings, including other professional level avalanche courses
 - Current familiarity with Pro 2 curriculum
- **Pro 2 Lead Trainer**
 - All of the Above, plus:
 - Education:
 - Attendance at a A3-run Pro Trainers Workshop
 - Experience
 - Experience teaching Pro 1 and/or Pro 2 Courses
 - Management of teams
 - Experience forecasting in multiple snow climates
- **A3 Pro Trainer Workshop Facilitator:**
 - All of the Pro 2 Lead Trainer qualifications, plus:
 - Willingness to work collaboratively with the A3 in providing high quality, consistent training and familiarization for current and aspiring Pro Trainers.

- **A3 Pro Course Provider Reviewer:**

- Reviewer must have experience teaching professional-level avalanche courses (e.g. Pro 1, Pro 2, NAS, Level 3, etc) and meet at least one of the following qualifications:
 - 10 winter seasons (at least 200 days) forecasting or teaching college-level avalanche curriculum.
 - Experience managing and/or leading an operational avalanche program.
 - A graduate degree in Snow Science.
- Additionally, Reviewer must demonstrate:
 - Willingness to work collaboratively with the A3 in providing high quality, consistent professional avalanche training through the A3 Pro Training Program.
 - Commitment to providing unbiased assessments throughout the Pro Course Provider review process, including both positive and constructive feedback as needed.
 - Commitment to maintaining confidentiality of Course Provider materials and review process.
- Prior participation in a A3 Pro Trainer Workshop is desired but not required.

PRO TRAINER WORKSHOP

As stated above, it is required that all Course Leaders attend a Pro Trainer Workshop. A3 will offer at least one workshop a year (more will be available as needed). These workshops are intended to be in addition to in-house training and are open to all Course Provider's instructors and occasionally other avalanche industry professionals. A sample agenda can be found [here](#).

Training Length: 2 days for Pro 1, 1 day for Pro 2* (subject to change as of winter 23/24)

Training Vision: The A3 Pro Trainer Workshop provides an opportunity for future Pro Course Instructors/Course Leaders to gain hands-on exposure and experience in demonstrating, teaching, and evaluating the skills and proficiencies on A3 Pro Training courses. Course participants will connect and engage with each other and the A3 Pro Training Program to:

- Effectively maintain training and evaluation consistency across courses/providers
- Collaborate to improve the program for the overall benefit of worker safety within the avalanche industry.

Training Objectives:

- Describe the structure and details of the A3 Pro Training Program and articulate these details to a larger audience.
- Identify the skills and proficiencies being taught on the Pro 1 and Pro 2 courses.
- Demonstrate all skills and proficiencies to the standard described in the detailed course documents.
- Apply the grading rubrics to maintain consistency of evaluations.
- Facilitate a platform for continuing professional development for avalanche educators.

PRO COURSE PROVIDER IN-HOUSE TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS

Every Pro Course Provider must hold training for Pro Course Trainers in addition to (and separate from) any recreational instructor trainings. These trainings are led, at the discretion of the Provider, by at least one individual who has attended an A3 Pro Trainer Workshop and who is well-versed in the details of the Pro Training Program and courses. These in-house training recommendations help maintain quality and consistency within the A3 Pro Training Program.

Recommended Training Length: Minimum 8 hours focused on Pro Training Program/courses for new Professional Trainers; annual Pro Training updates and continuing education encouraged for all Professional Trainers (see below).

Sample Topics for In-House Training:

Specific In-House Training agenda and structure are at the discretion of the Course Provider. Below are topics to consider addressing:

- The role and scope of the A3 Pro Training Program
- Risk Management
 - Appropriate terrain and margins (e.g. Conger’s ISSW 2016 paper “Avalanche Close Calls During Courses”)
 - Run Lists and Terrain Atlases
 - Distribute and review CP risk management plan
- Pro Course Specifics and Details
 - Skills and proficiencies
 - Professional observations and documentation
 - Course-specific goals and outcomes
 - Example exercises and activities
- Teaching techniques
 - Teaching to SWAG standards
 - Providing excellent instructor demos
 - Practice and role-play
 - Practicing effective student feedback
 - Making space for participant practice
- Creating a positive learning environment
 - Combating exam stress
 - Making the most of adverse weather
- Assessment
 - Setting students up for success
 - Marking criteria and rubrics
 - Incorporating re-tests where applicable
 - Managing instructor bias and/or potential conflict of interest
 - Assessing and managing students at, near, and below the standard

CONTINUED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The A3 encourages annual continuing education and professional development for all Professional Trainers. At this time, there is no oversight of or requirement to complete CPD and it is done purely on an honor system. This may include a combination of:

- Annual in-house training focused on relevant Pro Training topics with an employer/Provider,
- Attendance at regional workshops (SAW's) and/or ISSW,
- Taking other courses (in-person or online) related to snow, weather, avalanches, pedagogy/education methodologies, and/or other pertinent topics,
- Shadowing or work within a different operational setting,
- Working with a formal mentor,
- Other opportunities that advance skills, knowledge, and/or professional experience.