

American Avalanche Association Professional Training Program Structure and Oversight

Professional Training Program:

To promote excellence and consistency in professional avalanche training in the United States, the American Avalanche Association (AAA) coordinates and oversees the Professional Training Program. Through ongoing collaboration with avalanche industry professionals, the AAA works 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 AAA promotes course quality and consistency within the Pro Training Program: the AAA Pro Course Provider review process, defined Pro Trainer Qualifications, facilitation of AAA Pro Trainer Workshops, defined In-House Training Guidelines, and the specific Course Guidelines and Proficiencies. Three of these critical components are detailed in this document (Course Provider review, Pro Trainer qualifications, and In-House Training guidelines).

American Avalanche Association Personnel:

Executive Director: Works collaboratively with the Professional Training Coordinator (PTC) 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 Training Coordinator. 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 Training Coordinator (PTC): Program lead for Pro Training Program. The (PTC) is responsible for the development, organization, and implementation of all professional training materials. The PTC serves as the primary point of contact for professional course providers and trainers. The PTC is responsible for gathering feedback from course providers and industry stakeholders in the development and update of professional courses. The PTC serves as the facilitator of the Industry Advisory Group. The PTC organizes, plans, and implements AAA professional training workshops.

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

Industry Advisory Group (IAG): The IAG advises the AAA on training standards and best practices for professional course trainers, core course proficiencies, and outcomes. The IAG is comprised of six to eight active avalanche professionals selected to represent all segments of the industry, pertinent geographical regions of the country, and broad understanding of the snow and avalanche industry.



Professional Course Providers

Professional Course Providers must meet the Professional Course Requirements for approval by the AAA through the process described below. Course providers can be approved for any or all of the professional courses. Professional Course Provider requirements and the Course Provider review process help maintain quality and consistency within the AAA Pro Training Program. Once approved, a Professional Course Provider will maintain eligibility to offer each course by:

- Updating its curricula based upon recommendations from the AAA. Curriculum changes will be made as a collaborative effort between the AAA, recommendations from the IAG, and feedback from the course providers.
- Consenting to additional reviews as requested by the AAA up to two times in a 10-year period
- Maintaining courses staffed by AAA approved instructors.

Professional Training Course Requirements:

- **Lead Trainer:** Each course must be staffed by at least one AAA-approved Lead Trainer.
- All Instructors must have received training consistent with the Trainer requirements for the course.
- Student-Instructor Ratios are observed for all field and evaluation components of the course.
- Additional instructors may be used at any point to aid in student learning, but are not applied to the student-instructor ratio.

Course Provider Requirements:

- Course Provider must be a legal entity with adequate and appropriate insurance coverage(s) with “American Avalanche Association” named as Additionally Insured. Course Provider will provide a Certificate of Insurance to the AAA prior to syllabus approval.
- Course Provider must 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.
- Course Provider must have a comprehensive, documented risk management plan.
- Course Provider must 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).
- Course Provider must sign an agreement defining its relationship with the AAA, including an agreement to maintain insurance and to indemnify AAA against any claims, and stating its commitment to provide quality professional training and fair student assessments.
- Course Provider must have a staff that meets the Lead Trainer and Trainer requirements for all courses the Provider is approved to offer.

Proof of these requirements must be submitted in writing prior to the syllabus approval process.

Course Provider Approval Process:

Syllabus Approval –

A general syllabus for each professional level course the provider plans to offer must be submitted by June 15 of the summer prior to holding courses. The PTC will review each syllabus to ensure that course skills and proficiencies are met. The submission will include a detailed course agenda with some sample exercises/activities, as these will allow for a more effective initial review. A course provider may adjust and adapt a general syllabus as needed on any professional course, as long as all course content is covered and all standard evaluation criteria completed. Follow-up questions and information will be requested as needed. A deposit of \$300 is required at the time of submission of the syllabus. The initial \$300 Course Provider deposit will be applied towards the total Course Provider review fees (see below), though the deposit will not be refunded if, for any reason, the Course Provider is not approved or does not complete the review process.

Provisional Status –

Once the AAA has approved a Course Provider's syllabi and scheduled a collaborative review for the following winter, the Course Provider is granted provisional status. This designates that the Course Provider is successfully moving through the approval process and has authorization to market and run professional training courses through the AAA Pro Training Program. Final approval of the course provider is dependent on completing the collaborative review process.

Collaborative Review Process –

The AAA will send a representative to observe a professional level course during the first winter of operation. The AAA representative will be available as a resource to assist in questions regarding the learning outcomes and evaluation process of each course. The AAA will work with Course Provider staff to promote standardization in the evaluation processes. Within two weeks of the course completion, the AAA representative will complete a course report that includes any recommendations.

Approved Professional Course Provider –

Pending a successful completion of the collaborative review, the course provider will receive approved status. The course provider may be subject to ongoing observations of its course(s) to ensure continuing course quality. Such additional observations will occur no more than twice in a 10-year period and will be at no cost to the course provider.

Course Provider Fees –

Initial collaborative review fees will be variable and based on actual costs to the AAA for a given collaborative review process (currently estimated at \$4,800). This fee will include initial review of application, syllabus, and staff, the in-person observation by an AAA reviewer (wages, lodging, food, travel), and post-review follow up by AAA staff.

AAA Course Provider Review Process –

The PTC will lead the initial review of the Course Provider requirements. A team of at least two qualified individuals will review course documentation and materials. All materials submitted to the AAA for

review by the team will remain confidential and be retained for the purposes of the review process only. One of the members of the initial review team will be sent for the onsite portion of the collaborative review process. The AAA 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 AAA or by AAA reviewers without explicit written consent of the course provider.

If a Course Provider's application does not meet the standards of the review, AAA Pro Training Coordinators will provide timely feedback prior to review notification date. Reviewers will request further clarification or documents from a Provider, if needed. Providers will have an opportunity to supplement with any requested documents prior to review notification. This process will extend no longer than the review notification date. If a Provider decides to withdraw its application at any point, all Provider's materials will be returned. In this case, the AAA Review deposit will be kept by the AAA.

Course Provider Review Appeals Policy –

If a Provider wishes to appeal its review decision, a written appeal must be submitted to the AAA no later than two weeks after the original decision was communicated to the Provider. AAA Pro Training Coordinators and/or Reviewers will communicate with Provider about what additional materials are needed to proceed with the appeal. The Provider will have two weeks to submit additional requested materials. If the Provider does not meet review standards within six weeks of the initial appeal, it must reapply for Pro Training Course Provider approval during the next review period. Any appeal will be reviewed by a committee consisting of the Pro Training Coordinator, the original reviewers, and at least two additional AAA staff, Board members and/or IAG members. If a consensus response to the appeal cannot be reached by the committee, the matter will be brought before the AAA Board for a vote. The majority opinion of a quorum of the AAA Board will be the final decision in such a case. The AAA will notify Provider of appeal decision within three weeks of submission of all requested supplemental material. Expenses incurred by the AAA as the result of a protracted appeal (more than eight hours of AAA Pro Training time and/or additional non-staff expenses) will be the responsibility of the Course Provider and billed accordingly.

AAA Certification and Pro Student Fees –

The AAA will provide a AAA Pro Training Course certificate to all individuals who successfully complete a Pro Training Course, is a current AAA member, and has paid a Pro Training administrative fee directly to the AAA (currently \$25/course). The AAA recommends that any student who enrolls on a AAA Pro Training course is a current member of the AAA (at any membership level) AND pays the Pro Training administrative fee prior to their course. The AAA requests that all Course Providers strongly encourage each of their Pro course students to meet these requirements upon enrolling on a AAA Pro Training Program course. AAA membership and payment of the Pro Training administrative fee help support the AAA in achieving the overall goals of the AAA Pro Training Program - high quality, consistent professional avalanche training opportunities in the United States. Long-term, AAA membership and payment of the student admin fee may become a requirement for Pro Training course enrollment.

Professional Trainer Qualifications:

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

- **Pro 1 Trainer:**
 - Professionalism
 - AAA 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
 - Annual in-house training consistent w/ AAA recommendations
 - Experience instructing avalanche courses or trainings
 - Experience in a mentorship role
 - Current familiarization with curriculum
- **Pro 1 Lead Trainer**
 - All of the Above, plus:
 - Education
 - Attendance at a AAA-run 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
 - AAA professional member in good standing
 - Pro 2 certificate or equivalent
 - Operational Experience
 - Minimum 10 winter seasons (at least 200 days) operational risk management
 - Education
 - Annual in-house training consistent with AAA recommendations
 - Experience in a mentorship role
 - Experience instructing avalanche courses or trainings
 - Experience instructing the PRO 1 course
 - Familiarity with curriculum
- **Pro 2 Lead Trainer**
 - All of the Above, plus:
 - Education:
 - Attendance at a AAA-run Trainers Workshop
 - Experience
 - Experience teaching Pro 1 and Pro 2 Courses
- **AAA Pro Trainer Workshop Facilitator:**
 - All of the Pro 2 Lead Trainer qualifications, plus:



- Willingness to work collaboratively with the AAA in providing high quality, consistent training and familiarization for current and aspiring Pro Trainers.
- **AAA 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 AAA in providing high quality, consistent professional avalanche training through the AAA 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 AAA Pro Trainer Workshop is desired but not required.

Pro Course Provider In-House Training Recommendations:

Every Pro Course Provider must hold trainings 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 AAA 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 AAA Pro Training Program.

Training Length: Minimum 8 hours

Sample Topics for In-House Training:

The In-House Training agenda is at the discretion of the Course Provider. Below are topics to consider addressing:

- The role and scope of the AAA Pro Training Program
- Risk Management
 - Appropriate terrain and margins - consider: Steve 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

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 AAA 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. Pro Course Providers who wish to offer Pro 2 courses and have them recognized by the AMGA must staff these courses with a minimum of one Certified Ski Guide. The AAA will facilitate connecting any pending Pro 2 Course Provider directly with the AMGA to formalize this recognition for potential future Pro 2 students.