



ACCREDITATION COUNCIL HANDBOOK

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I. The Accreditation Program

A. About AEE

In 1994, the Association for Experiential Education (AEE) responded to a need by developing the most comprehensive standards for common practices in the industry, becoming the nation's first recognized accreditation process focusing on experiential adventure programming. Since then, the AEE Accreditation Programs standards-based evaluation process by independent reviewers has become the industry-accepted level of professional evaluation for experiential and adventure programs.

The purpose of the Accreditation Program is to advance the professional practices of organizations offering adventure-based experiential education and outdoor behavioral healthcare.

Attaining accredited status through the AEE Accreditation Program is solid evidence of an organization's commitment to quality and safety, belief in professional standards, and allocation of resources toward continued excellence and improvement. Programs that achieve AEE accredited status report they are confident that they meet or exceed recognized industry standards.

B. Goals

The primary goals of the AEE Accreditation Program are to:

- set standards of practice.
- provide education in furtherance of our purpose.
- assess organizations for quality assurance.

C. Overview

The accreditation process is designed and managed by the Director of Standards Development and Accreditation (Director) and the Accreditation Council (Council), and includes five steps:



1. The Accreditation process begins with the program application.
2. Once eligibility is determined and the application is accepted, the program is assigned a Council Liaison. The Council Liaison supports the program in developing an internal review in the form of a Self-Assessment Study (SAS). The program must submit a completed SAS to their Council Liaison for approval at least 90 days before a site visit may be scheduled, and the Council Liaison must review the SAS within 21 days of receipt of formal submission.
3. Once the SAS is approved, an accreditation review team is selected to conduct a site visit. The site visit process is normally completed within six months of approval of the SAS. The review team composes a Site Visit Report, identifying areas of compliance and non-compliance, which must be submitted to the Council Liaison for approval within 14 days of completion of the site visit. Within 30 days of the site visit the program will receive the final Site Visit Report, after which time they have 60 days to submit their Program Response to Site Visit Report.
4. Once the program has submitted their Program Response to Site Visit Report, the Council Liaison prepares the Liaison Report for the Accreditation Council who then vote on the program's accreditation at the next scheduled deliberation.
5. Following initial accreditation, the program's ongoing accreditation is contingent on satisfactory submission and acceptance of Annual Reports and payment of annual fees.

A thorough outline can be found in the *Outline of AEE Accreditation Process* document.

II. Accreditation Program - Roles and Responsibilities

The Accreditation Council (Council) was established by the AEE Board of Directors, which has delegated the oversight of and responsibility for the Council to the Chief Executive Officer of AEE (CEO). The CEO has final overall authority for the Accreditation Program.

Director of Accreditations and Certifications

The AEE Accreditation Program is designed and managed by the Director and the Council.

The Director has primary responsibility for all operational aspects of AEE's Accreditation Program, including developing strategies for the growth and success of

the program and contributing to the development of products and services targeted to the needs of organizational members that further the mission of the organization and add value for AEE's organizational members.

Summary of Responsibilities

- Manage all aspects of the AEE Accreditation Program, including planning, budgeting, reporting, delivering service, follow up on Accreditation Council actions, and evaluating all aspects of the program.
- Ex-officio, non-voting member of the AEE Accreditation Council.
- Recruit, train, and supervise all Accreditation Program volunteers. Train and support Accreditation Council Liaisons with their work on the Council. Approve site visit reports in partnership with Liaisons.
- Develop and grow public awareness about AEE Accreditation and the value of Accreditation outside of AEE.
- Promote experiential education to the public, advocate for the mission of AEE, and represent AEE on various outside committees and councils and at conferences and events.
- Promote membership in AEE.
- Research, evaluate, develop, implement, and manage marketing and outreach efforts for AEE's accredited members.
- Develop accredited member retention plans and goals.
- Develop accredited member recruitment plans and goals.
- Manage accredited member services, programs, and partnerships.
- Supervise project staff (paid and/or volunteer) and delegate tasks accordingly.
- File and keep records and data as required.
- Orient and provide training for new council members.
- Keep abreast of advancements in the field.

Accreditation Council

Purpose

To design, promote, monitor, and evaluate the Accreditation Program in cooperation with the Director.

Summary of Responsibilities

- Set policy and procedures for the Accreditation Program.
- Develop, adopt, maintain, evaluate, and revise Accreditation Program standards.
- Grant or deny accredited status in accordance with Accreditation Program policy.
- Establish policy and procedures for the selection, training, and evaluation of volunteer personnel to conduct the accreditation process.
- Facilitate the development of educational materials related to the Accreditation Program.

- Periodically assess the success of the program and revise it as necessary to achieve its mission.

See *Section V. Role of Liaison* below. Also see *Accreditation Council Job Description* for full position description.

Liability

All Council members and designated committees therein, while performing their duties as specified here, are considered officers of AEE and therefore are included in the Directors' and Officers' Liability Insurance Policy for the Association.

III. Council - Membership and Structure

Membership

- The Council consists of a number of voting members with a target ratio of one member per seven accredited programs.
- The Council may have additional advisors that are non-voting members for committee work.
- The Director is a non-voting, ex-officio member of the Council and all committees.
- Council members are elected for a term of three years and may serve up to three consecutive terms. After being off the Council for a full year, a past Council member may be nominated to re-apply for the Accreditation Council as a new member.
- Terms begin upon election by the Council and conclude at the end of the annual conference. (Exceptions may be made to maintain consistency in program relationships (i.e., complete liaison process).

Officers

Officers of the Council are the Chair, Past Chair and Secretary. The officers are elected by the Council at its fall meeting for a two-year term beginning at the end of the fall meeting (or November 15) if there is no fall meeting. Officers can serve up to two consecutive terms.

Nominations Process: Nominations for officers are solicited by the Director before the mid-year in-person meeting of the Accreditation Council. Council members may nominate themselves or other members of the Council for the officer positions.

Voting Process: Votes are cast by secret ballot and counted by at least 2 members of the Council

Duties of “The Chair”

- Preside over Council meetings.
- Appoint all temporary or permanent committee chairs and members.
- Serve as an ex-officio member of Council standing committees and ad hoc working groups.
- Work with Council members on performance issues around attending meetings, being a collaborative member, and doing assigned work,
- Serve as the principal spokesperson for Council.

Duties of “The Past Chair”

- Assist the Chair in learning the duties of the Chair role as requested.
- Become Acting Chair of the Council, with all the rights, privileges, and powers as if the duly elected Chair, in the event of the absence or inability of the Chair to exercise the office.
- Provide assistance with the managing of the accreditation reviewer pool.
- If current Past Chair is not available, then the most recent Chair (currently on the council) will fulfill this role.

Duties of “The Secretary”

- Document, manage, and facilitate dissemination of minutes, actions, and other documents as appropriate.
- Serve as Chair when current Chair and Past Chair are unavailable. There should be a secretary-elect so that they can learn the roles to take over and cover if necessary.

Meetings

- The Council meets as often as it deems necessary to conduct the business of the Council.
- The Council holds in-person meetings annually. The in-person meetings are scheduled in conjunction with the AEE International Conference (fall) and again approximately mid-year.
- Teleconference meetings are scheduled as needed, usually monthly.
- North American members attend two in-person meetings per year and monthly meetings via teleconference.
- Members from outside North America attend one in-person meeting per year and monthly meetings via teleconference.

See *Section VI Council Meeting Protocols* below.

Committees

There are two standing committees of the Council. Council members serve on these committees as needed or requested by the chair.

Standards Committee's Charge

- Develop and maintain the evaluation standards of the Accreditation Program.
- Monitor current practices and trends in adventure education programming.
- Oversee the periodic revision of the *Manual of Accreditation Standards for Adventure Programs* and *The Manual of Accreditation Standards for Outdoor Behavioral Healthcare*.

Governance Committee's Charge

- Develop and maintain Accreditation Council policy and procedures for all aspects of this program.
- Recruit qualified individuals to serve on Council.

Education & Outreach Committee's Charge

- Develop and maintain internal education for programs, reviewers, and council members.
- Coordinate efforts for external education related to accreditation, such as workshops or webinars.
- Engage in outreach that promotes awareness of and impact of AEE Accreditation.

Ad Hoc Committees

- The Chair may appoint ad hoc committees as the need arises. These ad hoc committees disband after their charge is completed.
- Ad hoc committees will be chaired by Council members and may include persons not on Council who have the necessary expertise needed on the committee.

Recruitment and Removal of Council Members

Recruitment

1. Recruitment of new Council members is facilitated by the Governance Committee.
2. Applications are solicited from the general public and the AEE membership through means deemed appropriate by the Governance Committee.
3. Interested applicants are sent the AEE Accreditation Council job description, the AEE Travel Policy, and any other relevant documents.
4. Interested applicants are asked to complete the Accreditation Council Application.
5. Governance committee reviews applications and makes initial recommendations for Council vote.
6. Recommendations are voted by the Council.

Council Vacancies

- Any vacancy that occurs will be filled by the same procedures as new-member recruitment.
- Replacement members complete the term of the person they replaced and may serve up to two additional terms.

Supervision and Removal

- Council members are expected to perform their duties as outlined in this manual. The Chair is responsible for communicating with Council members who do not fulfill their responsibilities and if necessary, bring the matter before the Council.
- Council members who are unable to perform their duties may be removed from the Council by a majority vote of the Council.

The Council conducts its business in a manner consistent with the AEE Code of Conduct:

Conflict of Interest

Definition: to derive personal or professional benefit from decisions made in your role as a volunteer in the Association for Experiential Education's accreditation program.

AEE staff and volunteers associated with the Accreditation Program, including Council members and reviewers, act as agents of AEE with an interest in enriching lives through experiential education. The Accreditation program has a further interest in advancing the professional practices of organizations offering adventure-based experiential education and outdoor behavioral healthcare by advancing standards of practice. AEE's interest is to help programs improve practices; therefore, any deviation from this interest should be disclosed and discussed with the Director of Accreditation for guidance. The foundational ethics for this work is fairness and transparency. As

such, any situation in which a conflict of interest may occur (potentially undermining fairness and transparency) must be reported to the Director.

In cases where a conflict of interest cannot be avoided, Council members will excuse themselves from related accreditation processes and deliberations. The Director will determine if there is a conflict of interest and, if necessary, consult the full Council. The Director is responsible for removing any Council members who compromise the integrity of the Accreditation Program.

In order to avoid situations that could be perceived as a conflict of interest, Council members will

- disclose any current or prior relationships with an individual or organization that is currently in the accreditation process or Council work.
- avoid directly marketing or promoting commercial relationships with organizations while engaged in an official accreditation role
- avoid using confidential information gained through the accreditation process for personal or professional gain,
- decline to serve as a reviewer or Council Liaison for organizations to which they have been a commercial relationship within the previous 12 months or
- decline to engage in a commercial relationship with an organization within 12 months following being a reviewer or liaison with an organization,
- will connect with the Director of Accreditation and the Chair of the Council If a potential conflict emerges that might fall within any of the criteria listed above to discuss and determine any potential steps that are needed to prevent a conflict of interest to the Accreditation Program.

Confidentiality

Any information provided by the organization for the purpose of accreditation will be considered confidential and will only be used by the Accreditation Council, AEE staff, and AEE reviewers in the accreditation process. Any documents provided for the purpose of accreditation must be safeguarded and maintained in confidence. The deliberations, status, and results of accreditation are reported only to the appropriate members of the program, the AEE Accreditation Program Staff, and the Accreditation Council.

A full summary of AEE Ethical Guidelines can be found on the '*AEE Code of Conduct*' document.

V. Role of the Liaison

Accreditation

The role of the Council Liaison is to provide oversight of the accreditation process for organizations seeking initial or continuing accreditation.

Summary of Responsibilities

- Assist organizations with matters pertaining to the accreditation process.
- Mentor the development of the Self-Assessment Study.
- Review and approve Self-Assessment Studies.
- Review and approve Site Visit Reports with Director.
- Review and approve the Program Response to the Site Visit Report.
- Author Liaison Reports for submission to Council.
- Represent program to the Council with respect to matters relating to initial and continuing accreditation.

Accreditation Council Liaison Procedures

Upon application from a Program, the Director will designate a liaison for the Program. The following steps describe the process:

1. The Director receives an application from a Program. The application is reviewed and the Director either accepts or rejects it.
2. Upon acceptance, the Director assigns the organization a Council Liaison who will assist the organization throughout the self-assessment and accreditation process. *See the AEE Liaison Contact Template* for ideal messaging to explain the Organization-Liaison relationship.
3. When the final draft Self-Assessment Study (SAS) is submitted, the Liaison reads the SAS and either accepts or sends it back for revision. After all needed revisions are made, the Council Liaison approves the SAS as ready for use by the Site Visit Review Team. The following represents the agreed “bar” for approving an SAS (this has been copied from the *Liaison Checklist*):
 - a. Liaison reads the response to every standard.
 - b. Every applicable standard is responded to.
 - c. Each component of a standard is responded to (including narrative/explanations and evidence).
 - d. Response addresses the language of the standard.
 - e. Response is understandable, clear and logical.
 - f. Each narrative response stands alone. One narrative should not reference another response.
 - g. Narrative does not restate the evidence but explains the context of the evidence.
 - h. Evidence is hyperlinked.

- i. Any standard reported to be Not Applicable is double checked by the Liaison.
4. Upon approval of the SAS, the Director works with the organization to schedule the site visit and find reviewers.
5. Liaison contacts the Lead Reviewer with thoughts and concerns and commits to being available for consultation during the site visit (this can be delegated to the Director if the liaison is not available).
6. Liaison writes the Liaison report according to the *Liaison Report Template*.
7. Note: Liaison Reports are to be added and documents uploaded to the meeting agenda Google folder by noon on the Friday (Pacific Time) before the council meeting.
8. Liaison represents the organization to the council.

A complete and chronological list of Liaison tasks can be found on the *Council Liaison Checklist*.

Annual Reports

Accredited Programs are required to submit an Annual Report each year to maintain their accreditation. Programs going through a Continuing Accreditation do not submit an annual report in the year of their site visit.

The Director will provide access to Annual Reports and necessary documentation from prior reports/reviews.

Annual reports are reviewed by an organization's Council Liaison.

1. Council Liaisons ensure that Annual Reports are complete, include supporting documentation, and that requests for information or responses to conditions established by Council are included.
2. Programs involved in either Initial or Continuing Accreditation in the year prior to its current Annual Report require special attention. When analyzing these Annual Reports, ensure corrective actions to any Unmet Standards are now met. (For example, if an organization reported a plan to form a risk management committee and hold their first meeting by a particular date, did they provide evidence that they did this?)
3. Council Liaisons are encouraged to directly contact (e.g. call/skype/zoom etc.) the organization to discuss the report, if there are any questions.
4. If there is any incomplete or missing information, or if there are any "red-flags" (cause for concern) in reviewing the report, follow-up with the organization is necessary.
5. Questions about an organization's Annual Report may first be discussed with the Director.
6. Council Liaisons will document their review on the *Annual Report Review Form*.

7. Council Liaisons are to add their completed *Annual Report Review Forms* to the meeting agenda Google folder by noon on the Friday (Pacific Time) before the council meeting.
8. Council Liaisons convey any concerns to the Council at the meeting at which the Annual Report is to be considered.
9. Any serious incidents reported within an Annual Report are to be conveyed to the Council. Serious incidents include those that resulted in fatality, disability, in-patient hospitalization, or an incident that took a significant amount of the organization's time or energy to address. The council will review the incident to determine if any further action is necessary. See the *AEE Significant Incident Review SOP* for an outline of the process by which AEE examines such incidents.
10. Council Liaisons are responsible for informing the organization their report was reviewed and accepted.

VI. Council Meeting Protocols

Rules of Order for Accreditation Council Meetings

Discussion of issues and formal motions allows the Council to cast informed votes. The purposes of discussion are the airing of supporting and opposing views and the provision of additional information of relevance in consideration of any motion. Ideally, discussion allows us to better understand each other's views and helps the Council move toward agreement on the issues at hand.

Currently Council meetings take place the 3rd Wednesday of the month and reports from Council members are due before noon Pacific the Friday before.

The Chair's responsibility is to move the discussion forward balancing informality with efficiency, keeping the discussion on topic, and allowing all those who wish to speak to do so.

Taking Formal Action

1. Fifty percent of Council members must be present to call a meeting to order.
2. A motion must be made and seconded before taking formal action.
3. During discussion of a motion, any voting Council members can offer an amendment to the motion. Proposed amendments are handled in one of the following ways:
 - The members who moved and seconded the original motion may accept the amendment, in which case discussion proceeds on the amended motion.
 - The members who moved and seconded the original motion may reject the amendment, in which case discussion of the

amendment ensues.

4. At the conclusion of the discussion on the amendment a vote is taken on the amendment. If the amendment passes, discussion returns to the original motion in its amended form. If the amendment is rejected, discussion returns to the original motion without amendment.

Voting

1. A quorum of 2/3rds of current members must be present for a vote to take place.
2. Conflicts of interest are discussed (actual, potential, or perceived) and who cannot vote is determined.
3. Votes will usually be conducted by a show of hands. Any vote may be conducted by secret ballot at the discretion of the Council or the Chair.
4. Voting Council members may vote on any motion in one of three ways:
 - For the motion,
 - Against the motion, or
 - Abstain. 60% of voting members present carries a motion. Abstentions do not count in determining the vote total. This will make an abstention neutral in the vote count.
5. Discussion on a topic may be ended in any of the following ways:
 - A calling of the question by a voting member whose turn it is to speak. At that time the Council votes either to continue discussion or to end discussion and move to a vote. Members must vote either Yes or No when the question is called.
 - A request by the Chair for a vote to end discussion. At that time the Council votes either to continue discussion or to end discussion and move to a vote.
 - Withdrawal of a motion by those who moved and seconded the motion.
 - Tabling of the motion by the Chair.
6. Any motion on the floor must be resolved in one of the following ways
 - Adopted.
 - Rejected.
 - Withdrawn by the members who moved and seconded the motion.
 - Referred by the Council or by the Chair back to small group for revision.
 - Tabled by the Council or by the Chair for later consideration or vote.
7. Role of a Council member when they have been a reviewer on a site visit that is under discussion by the Council:
 - Liaison delivers Liaison Report (and holds off on making a motion).
 - Council enters discussion with reviewer in the room to answer questions.
 - Liaison offers their motion.

- Council deliberates on accreditation (i.e. the motion), with reviewer to refrain from this portion of the discussion.
- Vote (Council members who participated in the site visit abstain from voting)

Electronic Voting

- The Chair may advance a straight-forward motion to electronic vote.
- An electronic vote may only take place after a motion is presented, seconded and discussed at a Council meeting.
- The Director must approve the topic of an electronic vote.
- Electronic votes will be conducted in the same way as in-person votes:
 - A quorum of 2/3rds of current members must vote to recognize a result
 - Council members may vote “for” the motion, “against” the motion, or “abstain”
 - 60% of voting members carries a motion
- A motion voted electronically can only be “adopted” or “rejected”
- An electronic vote will remain open for a maximum of 7 days.
- The Director and Chair are responsible for tallying the votes and informing the Council of the outcome.
- The Council must review any electronic motions, adopted or rejected at the start of the next Council meeting.

Meeting Protocol

The meeting will follow a written agenda created by the Chair and Director and provided to Council members.

1. **Call to Order:** Fifty percent of Council members must be present to call a meeting to order.
2. **Approval of Agenda:** At this point in the agenda, council members may add or delete items from the agenda and may change the order of presentation. Unless there is objection, the Agenda is approved.
3. **Consent Agenda:** Members may request corrections to minutes or removal of an item. If there are no changes requested, the Consent Agenda is accepted.
Note: any items added to the consent agenda are to be added and documents received by the Director to post by noon on the Friday (Pacific Time) before the council meeting.
4. **Director’s Report:** program status report and other information items.
5. **Accreditation Vote:**
Before the meeting:

- Council members read the liaison report and documents associated with the organization's Response to the Site Visit Report (going into the SAS is rarely needed) and prepare any questions they might have.

At the meeting:

- Liaison overview: Liaison gives a succinct overview of their report, highlighting which standards they think are still not met. Then the floor will be opened for any additional discussion on any part of the Liaison Report.
- Question and Discussion Period: Chair seeks clarifying questions from Council on liaison's report. Liaison responds and answers questions that are raised. Chair gathers all of the specific concerns from the Council (i.e. Standard X.XX). Chair facilitates discussion on specific concerns raised by the Council (in clear order.)
- Tabling/Deferring discussions: Issues that do not directly affect the program's accreditation vote will be tabled by the Chair for future discussion.

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6. Motion to Vote:

- Liaison proposes a motion. Options: Accreditation, conditional accreditation, defer accreditation, or deny accreditation
- Council has an opportunity to amend the motion - new motion adopted or rejected.
- Council vote on the motion. Options: For, against, or abstain (Council members are required to abstain if they have a conflict of interest. They may also abstain if they are not ready to vote yes, or no.)

Note: A 6-year term is the preferred choice for a solid re-accreditation process for a well-run program. A 3-year term is granted if concerns exist around the stability of that organization, or if there are concerns about a pattern of unmet standards.

7. Old Business: motions tabled at previous meetings reopened for discussion and vote.

8. New Business: a motion must be moved and seconded by voting members of the Council for items to be discussed, with the exception of Annual Reports, as stated below.

9. Annual Reports

- *Before the meeting:*
 - Council members will read the Annual Reports that have been posted to the meeting file and prepare any questions they might have.
- *At the meeting:*
 - Liaison gives a succinct overview of their review, highlighting any missing information or questions on an annual report that has not been placed on

the consent agenda. They then open up the agenda item for questions and discussion.

- If there are no objections, the Annual Report will be received by the Council. (No vote is necessary.)
- Any other motions on the agenda.

10. **Committee Reports:** Informational report from Committee Chair or designated person. Motions may be submitted by the Committee for consideration.

11. **Other Business:** Topics for general discussion may be considered here without a necessary motion. A Council member may introduce a motion at any point during the discussion. The discussion will be limited to the motion and any amendments offered.

12. **Adjournment**

VII. Appendix

Documents referenced within the Accreditation Council Handbook are available in AEE's Google Drive: [Accreditation Council Handbook Appendices](#)

Accreditation Council Job Description

Accreditation Expense Reimbursement Downloadable Form

AEE Code of Conduct

AEE Liaison Intro Letter Template

AEE Significant Incident Review SOP

Annual Report Review Form

Liaison Checklist

Liaison Report Template

Outline of AEE Accreditation Process

