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 (AAA) 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 AAA, 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 AAA helps to promote 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): AAA program lead for the Pro Training Program. The PTC works with course providers and industry to develop and implement AAA-led instructor trainings. The PTC serves as the primary point of contact for professional course providers and trainers. He/she is responsible for working collaboratively with course providers, with input from the IAG on any updates for professional courses. The PTC serves as the facilitator of the Industry Advisory Group. The PTC is responsible for the organization and implementation of course provider reviews and pro 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 desired worker outcomes and helps inform educators on necessary professional skills. 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 certain requirements and successfully complete a rigorous review process with the AAA for approval to teach AAA 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 AAA Pro Training Program.

**Overview of Course Provider Requirements:**

In joining the AAA 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 AAA and other Providers involved in the Pro Training Program.
- Offer reciprocity for other Pro Providers’ courses when assessing student prerequisites.
- Update its curricula based on a collaborative process between the AAA 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 AAA, including specific legal requirements, and stating its commitment to provide quality professional training and fair student assessments.

Find specific details of Course Provider expectations and requirements in the *Course Provider Agreement*. 
Course Provider Approval Process:

Initial Review of Paperwork –
For the initial review, the Course Provider submits materials (e.g. syllabi, list of qualified trainers, planned Pro Training course dates, etc.) as described in the Course Provider Review Checklist and Grading Sheet. The PTC will review the Provider’s submission to ensure a complete application and distribute the application to two qualified, mutually-agreed upon Reviewers. Each Reviewer will independently review the Provider’s application to assess proposed details and plans for teaching Pro Training courses. The Reviewer and/or PTC may ask follow up questions or request additional information from the Provider during the initial review. If a Course Provider’s application does not meet the standards of the review, the PTC will provide timely feedback and request further clarification or documents from a Provider, if needed.

AAA will collect an application deposit from the Provider at the time of submission. The deposit will not be refunded if, for any reason, the Course Provider is not approved or does not complete the review process. The AAA will communicate a formal decision on the initial review to the Course Provider once both Reviewers have completed their assessments.

Provisional Status –
If/when the Course Provider successfully completes the initial review and schedules their first on-site review, the Course Provider is granted ‘provisional’ status. This designates that the Course Provider is successfully moving through the approval process and has AAA approval to move forward in offering professional avalanche training courses through the AAA Pro Training Program for that season. Final approval of the Course Provider is dependent on successful completion of the on-site review process.

On-Site Review Process –
The AAA will send one Reviewer to observe at least one iteration of each Pro Training course a Provider plans to offer, ideally during the Provider’s first winter of operation teaching Pro Training courses. Whenever possible, one of the initial Reviewers will be sent to complete the on-site portion of the review process. For Providers who have not previously taught Level 3 courses, the AAA will observe two separate iterations of the Provider’s Pro 1 course over two separate seasons to help ensure course quality and consistency within the Pro Training Program.

During the on-site reviews, the AAA Reviewer will observe and evaluate the Provider’s ability to teach, coach, and evaluate students on the skills and proficiencies outlined for that course. The Reviewer may also act as a resource for the Provider to answer questions related to the learning outcomes and student evaluation processes of each course. In addition to evaluation of the Provider, the on-site review promotes collaboration between the Provider and the AAA and consistency within the Pro Training Program. Within two weeks of course completion, the AAA Reviewer will complete a report that includes any recommendations for the Provider and notes successful/unsuccesful completion of the on-site review for that course.

Approved Professional Course Provider –
Pending successful completion of the on-site review(s), 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 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 will be variable and based on actual costs to the AAA for a given Provider’s review process (currently estimated at $4,800 per course observed). This fee will include initial review of application, syllabus, and staff, the on-site observation by an AAA Reviewer (wages, lodging, food, travel), and post-review follow up by AAA staff. The Provider is responsible for paying these costs. The AAA will invoice the Provider following each on-site review.

**Course Provider Confidentiality**
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. 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.

**Course Provider Review Appeals**
A Provider may appeal an unsatisfactory review decision. The appealing Provider must submit a written appeal to the AAA no later than two weeks after the original decision was communicated to the Provider. Further details of the appeals process can be found in the Pro Course Provider Agreement. Expenses incurred by the AAA as the result of a protracted appeal will be the responsibility of the Course Provider and billed accordingly.

**Pro Course Certificates and AAA Membership:**
The Provider is responsible for issuing a course certificate that includes the AAA logo and reference to the Pro Training Program to every student who successfully completes a Pro Training course. The AAA requests that all Course Providers encourage each of their Pro course students to be or become current members of the AAA. The AAA will provide supporting membership materials to Providers for distribution to students upon enrollment and during their Pro Training course. The AAA will note successful Pro course completion within the AAA database for any current member at the request of either the Provider or the student. AAA membership helps 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.

**Related Program Considerations:**

**American Avalanche Association Pro Training Program Transition:**
The AAA 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. Additional Pro Providers may join these ranks in the future, proceeding through the same rigorous review process as the above Providers.

The American Avalanche Association recognizes that change of this type and scope does not occur overnight. The AAA recommends that avalanche professionals and employers transition into the new Pro Training Program over the next several seasons, aiming for full alignment and integration within the next 5-6 years. See the Prior Learning Assessment document and Pro 1 Bridge document for further details of alignment opportunities.

Inevitably, the Pro Training Program will continue to evolve in the coming years. We will strive to learn and improve from experiences as we transition to this new paradigm for professional avalanche training in the United States. Changes to the program will be driven by the common goal of high quality, professional training opportunities for avalanche workers in the United States.

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.
Professional Trainer Qualifications:

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

● **Pro 1 Trainer:**
  o **Professionalism**
    ▪ AAA professional member in good standing
    ▪ Pro 2 Certificate or Equivalent (see Prior Learning Assessment)
  o **Operational Experience**
    ▪ Minimum 7 winters (at least 140 days) of operational risk management
  o **Education**
    ▪ In-house training consistent w/ AAA recommendations
    ▪ Experience instructing avalanche courses or trainings
    ▪ Experience in a mentorship role
    ▪ Current familiarity with Pro 1 curriculum

● **Pro 1 Lead Trainer**
  o All of the Above, plus:
  o **Education**
    ▪ Attendance at a AAA-run Trainers Workshop
  o **Experience**
    ▪ Minimum 7 winters (at least 140 days) operational risk management
    ▪ Experience teaching Pro 1 curriculum
    ▪ Fluent with evaluation criteria

● **Pro 2 Trainer**
  o **Professionalism**
    ▪ AAA professional member in good standing
    ▪ Pro 2 certificate or equivalent
  o **Operational Experience**
    ▪ Minimum 10 winter seasons (at least 200 days) operational risk management
  o **Education**
    ▪ In-house training consistent with AAA recommendations
    ▪ 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**
  o All of the Above, plus:
  o **Education:**
    ▪ Attendance at a AAA-run Trainers Workshop
  o **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.

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 AAA 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

The AAA encourages annual continuing education and professional development for all Professional Trainers. This may include a combination of:

- Annual in-house training focused on relevant Pro Training topics with an employer/Provider,  
- Attendance at regional workshops 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.