



# AMERICAN MOUNTAIN GUIDES ASSOCIATION

## SMALL BUSINESS ACCREDITATION MANUAL Version 1.0 2014



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## Acknowledgments

The AMGA accreditation program evolved from a safety review system used by Outward Bound since 1972. This manual was initially written in 1988 by Ian Wade, former safety officer for Outward Bound USA and past president of the AMGA. It was revised in 1992 by Steven Young, AMGA Executive Secretary, in 1995 by K.C. Baum, AMGA Accreditation Review Director, in 2002 by Jon Tierney with assistance from K.C. Baum, Marc Chauvin, Alain Comeau, Mark Houston, Arthur Haines, Joe Lentini, Charlie Townsend, Todd Vogel, and in 2012 by Ed Crothers, AMGA Accreditation Director. The present version builds upon their work.

## I. AMERICAN MOUNTAIN GUIDES ASSOCIATION ACCREDITATION OVERVIEW

American Mountain Guides Association Accreditation has been developed for any program offering climbing instruction, guided climbing or skiing services. First established in 1986, the evolution of the accreditation program has been guided by professional guides and climbing instructors who are leaders in the outdoor industry. The Accreditation Director, who works in conjunction with the Accreditation Committee, oversees the program. The Accreditation Committee is made up of AMGA certified guides and climbing instructors.

The purpose of AMGA Accreditation is to increase the professionalism of mountain guiding and climbing instruction in the United States by functioning as a tool for institutional self-evaluation and development. It is a voluntary means of quality assurance and external review that examines such things as business practices, compliance with state, federal and local regulations, staff training and professional development, resource stewardship, and adherence to current industry standards. This credential represents a commitment to excellence through exemplary operating standards and an adherence to the highest ethical standards of this profession. AMGA Accredited Programs represent many of the nations most recognized and respected guide services, climbing schools, and educational institutions

### **AMGA Accreditation and Certification**

*“Forward-thinking individuals are participating in AMGA courses and exams. Forward-thinking business owners are pursuing AMGA accreditation and increasing the number of AMGA trained and certified guides and instructors on staff.”*

AMGA Certification is a credential issued to individuals. It represents the International standard for Guides and climbing instructors in specific types of terrain. The AMGA is the only organization in the United States to offer a comprehensive training and certification programs for *mountain guides* that is recognized by the International Federation of Mountain Guides Associations (IFMGA). Additionally, it is the only organization in the U.S. that offers training and certification for *climbing instructors* that has been endorsed by the International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation (UIAA.)

AMGA Accreditation is a credential granted to programs that have successfully gone through the AMGA accreditation review process. Accredited Programs must demonstrate a commitment to high technical standards, strong programs, and a quality staff of engaged and engaging climbing instructors and guides. This is accomplished by requiring accredited programs to have AMGA certified guides and climbing instructors on staff. While it is not required that all of an accredited programs' guides or climbing instructors on staff are AMGA certified, it is an expectation that the program will encourage staff members to pursue AMGA certification, provide mentoring, and support staff through the AMGA training and certification process. Furthermore, it is required that programs conduct annual terrain specific trainings utilizing AMGA certified staff members.

### **Benefit to the Public**

Accreditation provides a consistent and meaningful standard by which to judge the reliability and professionalism of a guide service or climbing program. AMGA Accredited Programs inspires an exceptional client experience by:

- Creating and maintaining consistent industry standards
- Ensuring rigorous and uniform guide training
- Maintaining compliance with state and federal law
- Promoting ethical business practices

### **Benefit to Land Managers**

AMGA Accredited Programs work proactively with their staff, clients, public and private land managers, and the general public to actively engage in the protection of all mountain environments for the good of all people and for future generations.

### **Benefits to Accredited Programs**

- Improves your program through a thorough review of your business practices and infrastructure that focuses on encouraging and assisting programs in efforts to improve program quality.
- Provides opportunities for continuing staff education and professional development by giving your full-time guides a 10% discount on AMGA Mountain Guide Program courses and exams.
- Includes access to AMGA growing brand strength through the use of the AMGA Accreditation Logo in marketing and promotional materials.
- Gives greater exposure for your organization by being listed on the AMGA website, which includes a link to your website, company logo, and contact information. Note: the AMGA website averages 1000 hits a day.
- Ability to post jobs at no charge on AMGA's website, in the monthly E-newsletter, and in the AMGA Blog and Facebook sites.
- Offers access to public lands where AMGA Accreditation or Certification is required to obtain a commercial use permit.
- Includes an invitation to all employees, non-AMGA and AMGA members, to attend the AMGA Annual Conference and participate in free professional development clinics
- Promotes greater brand recognition through AMGA ads run in Rock and Ice, and Climbing magazines.
- Demonstrates to clients, potential clients, land management agencies, and competitors that your program is in compliance with nationally and internationally recognized performance standards.
- Adds credibility to the development of guiding and climbing instruction as a profession and improves public perception of the performance of the profession as a whole.
- Offers protection against unwanted regulation or court rulings by demonstrating to federal, state, and local regulators a commitment to the "public good" through a voluntary review process and commitment to high industry standards.
- Provides support, advocacy, and lobbying on access and regulatory issues.

## II. BECOMING ACCREDITED—THE PROCESS

### Steps to Accreditation:

#### 1. Application and Initiation

Program contacts AMGA Accreditation Director to discuss eligibility of said program for AMGA Accreditation. If eligible, the operator is directed to the Accreditation Manual and Self Assessment Questionnaire on the AMGA web site.

Only programs owned, operated, and staffed exclusively by Certified IFMGA Guides are eligible for this small business review. All staff must hold some form of ownership in the business. Staff cannot be employees or independent contractors.

#### 2. Accreditation Manual and Self Assessment Questionnaire

This manual can be accessed on the AMGA website as a PDF or can be emailed from the AMGA office as a Word document. It includes a description of the AMGA Accreditation Program and guidelines to help the operator complete the process. The following forms are included within the questionnaire:

- a. Accreditation Program Overview
- b. Program Questionnaire
- c. Supporting Document Checklist

#### 3. Accreditation Application Fee

A \$300 review fee must accompany the accreditation application. The annual membership dues are \$50/ year for the remainder of the 4-year accreditation contract.

#### 4. Review and Initial Report

The next step is for the program to complete self-assessment questionnaire and submit it to the AMGA Accreditation Director along with the requested supporting documents, and applicable accreditation fee. This fee covers accreditation review expenses. *Note: It is strongly recommended that this information be sent electronically as a DVD, CD or attachments to an email.* Doing so expedites the review process

The Accreditation Director carefully reviews the self-assessment questionnaire and supporting documents. While this is taking place, the Accreditation Director will be contacting land manager for areas where the program operates soliciting their input regarding the program's performance.

Once this has been completed the Accreditation Director will send the applicant an initial report, providing feedback where applicable. It will also include a list of changes that are deemed necessary to meet the AMGA accreditation standards, a request for additional documents if necessary, and a brief summary of the Accreditation Director's observations. The program has 30 days to respond to the recommendations being made in the initial report.

#### 5. Accreditation Report/ Program Responses\*

The Accreditation Director will review the response to the initial report and prepare a final report. In the Accreditation Report the Accreditation Director will recommend one of the following options:

A. Grant accreditation.

B. Defer accreditation contingent on additional information or specified corrective actions. If accreditation is deferred based on additional corrective measures being needed, the program will have 60 days to respond with a plan of action. The Accreditation Director will not make a formal decision to grant accreditation status until the program has responded in writing and all required changes have been met. Evidence that a program has met required changes might be based on one or more of the following:

- i. A written report indicating requested improvements have been made.
- ii. A meeting of representatives of the program with the accreditation director.

C. Deny accreditation. A program whose weaknesses are too numerous, too significant, or that has issues that cannot be eliminated within a prescribed period of time may be denied accreditation status at this time.

Once a decision has been reached by the Accreditation Director, the program will be contacted and informed of the final decision.

\*Note that until the Accreditation Director notifies a program, only the Accreditation Director may disseminate information about a decision. Following notification, decisions on applications shall be public information unless an appeal is in progress. The AMGA may release information to other agencies, media, and its membership about the accreditation status of programs.

## **6. Appeals**

The final decision of the Accreditation Director may be appealed in writing within thirty days by the program to the Accreditation Director. The Accreditation Director will acknowledge receipt of the appeal and forward it to the AMGA Board of Directors for timely resolution through communication with the program.

If agreement cannot be reached, then the issue will be brought to the AMGA Board for action at the next scheduled board meeting. The Board may appoint an independent committee to consider the appeal or the Board may hear the appeal itself. If a committee is appointed, they will make a recommendation to the Board at the next scheduled meeting. The decision of the Board at this meeting will be final and must be by a majority vote.

Any additional expenses incurred by the Accreditation Director as a result of a protracted review or appeal will be born by the program.

## 7. Accreditation Contract

If the AMGA grants accreditation, both the program and the AMGA will then sign an accreditation contract. Sample contract below:

### AMGA ACCREDITATION CONTRACT

(Four Year Term)

This Accreditation Contract (the “Contract”), made as of the \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_, by and between the American Mountain Guides Association (the “AMGA”) and \_\_\_\_\_ (the “[**Insert Short Name of Organization**]”), an AMGA Accredited Business, sets forth certain terms and conditions of membership in the AMGA Accreditation Program.

#### 1. Term and Termination.

- a. The effect of this Contract shall commence on the final approval date set forth by the AMGA Accreditation Director in a confirmation letter and terminating on December 31 of the following fourth calendar year, subject to the Conditions of Accreditation set forth in Article 2. For example, the term of a business accredited in April 2008 expires December 31, 2012. The Parties shall have the option to extend the term of this Contract for an additional four (4) year period from the expiration date of this Contract.

The current four (4) year accreditation expiration date of this Contract is: -  
\_\_\_\_\_.

- b. An expiration notice will be sent out by the AMGA office twelve (12) months prior to the Contract expiration date, and it is the responsibility of [**Organization**] to apply for and complete a re-review before the term expires (unless special arrangements have been made with the AMGA Accreditation Director or if the AMGA cannot accommodate). If the [**Organization**] has not renewed its Contract or responded to the AMGA office by the Contract expiration date, this Contract is terminated. A termination letter shall be sent to the [**Organization**] within one (1) month after the date of expiration of this Contract.
- c. Upon termination of this Contract and receipt of a termination letter, [**Organization**] is expressly prohibited from any further use of the AMGA logo and associated AMGA Accreditation Program advertising in any and all public literature. The [**Organization**] will be removed from the list of AMGA Accredited Businesses and must reapply through the AMGA office if future accreditation is desired.

#### 2. Conditions of Accreditation.

- a. On January 1, 2017, the AMGA will implement revised Accreditation Terrain and Education Standards (as more fully described in the AMGA Accreditation Manual in Attachment A to this Contract) (hereafter referred to as the “Revised Standards”). In order to retain AMGA accreditation, on January 1, 2017, **[Organization]** must be in compliance with the Revised Standards, regardless of the expiration date of this Contract. The AMGA reserves the right to terminate this Contract, if the **[Organization]** fails to comply with the Revised Standards on or before January 1, 2017.
  
- b. **[Organization]** shall conduct its business in accordance with the requirements of the AMGA, which are revised from time to time and documented in the AMGA Accreditation Manual, AMGA Accreditation Terrain and Education Standards, and the AMGA Code of Ethics. If **[Organization]** fails to adhere to AMGA accreditation requirements, the **[Organization]** will be subject to remedial action by the AMGA, which could result in suspension or revocation of the **[Organization’s]** accredited status. An appeal committee will be appointed by the AMGA Board of Directors to review any complaints received about **[Organization]**, to conduct a review if necessary, and to decide on a remedial action. If **[Organization’s]** accredited status is revoked, **[Organization]** must apply for a re-review before it can be regain its accredited status.
  
- c. **[Organization]** must join the AMGA at the Accreditation Program Member level and pay the associated annual membership dues. A program’s accredited status will be suspended by the AMGA Accreditation Director if the membership dues are over three (3) months delinquent.

The current contribution expiration date is .....

**[ORGANIZATION]:** .....

Signed By: ..... Date: .....

**AMERICAN MOUNTAIN GUIDES ASSOCIATION**

Signed By: ..... Date: .....  
 AMGA Accreditation Director



### **III. MAINTAINING ACCREDITATION**

#### **Duration Of Accreditation**

Accreditation remains valid as long as accreditation standards are maintained. A full Accreditation Self-Assessment Questionnaire must be submitted every four years along with the designated accreditation review fee.

#### **Changes That Affect Accreditation**

- New ownership.
- High incidence of fatalities or serious injuries within the program.
- Loss of insurance.
- Violation of AMGA code of ethics, such as illegal guiding or false marketing.

The self-assessment process relies on honest reporting. If a program no longer meets accreditation requirements, it must report this to the AMGA Accreditation Director who will work with the program if it desires to maintain accreditation.

#### **Spot Reviews**

Spot administrative reviews may be done at any point during the accreditation period to ensure compliance with accreditation guidelines. A field review can also be requested by a program, essentially for consulting purposes. The fee for this is determined by the size of the program and complexity of the review. The minimum fee begins at \$1000 plus expenses.

#### **Issues Arising During Accreditation Period**

If evidence is found that an accredited organization program has fallen below accepted practices or has breached the accreditation contract then one of the following actions will be taken by the Accreditation Director and/or AMGA Board of Directors based upon the “size” of the issue:

- Send letter of concern
- Send letter of warning
- Accreditation is immediately suspended pending further investigation
- Revocation

#### **Accreditation Marketing Guidelines**

The primary purpose of accreditation is to provide education and feedback to a program and a general assurance to the public that the organization has demonstrated ability to meet industry standards. Once achieved, programs may freely market their accredited status within AMGA Brand Policy guidelines.

Programs may not utilize any statements, logos, or graphics that suggest that they are accredited, or likely to be accredited, until they have received notification from the Accreditation Director that they are accredited.

Owners of programs who advertise falsely are subject to revocation of AMGA membership, of AMGA accreditation, and possibly legal action.

## IV. AMGA ACCREDITATION SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

### Instructions

Please answer the following questions concisely, but describe the full scope of your operations.

If the answer to a question can be found in the supporting documents accompanying the questionnaire, there is no need for a narrative. Simply indicate specifically where the information can be found within those documents. Where necessary, checkmarks can be inserted as an X or by using the option key+v on your keyboard.

### Confidentiality

The AMGA recognizes that programs applying for accreditation or re-accreditation are required to submit information that is crucial to the operation of said programs. All information exchanged during an accreditation review, whether it is written, electronic, oral, or observed, is held in the strictest confidence. Neither the AMGA Accreditation Committee, the AMGA Board of Directors, or the membership at large have access to any of the information submitted to the Accreditation Director prior to, during, or after an accreditation review. Information the Accreditation Director has received will be disclosed to other parties only when it is legally required, and then on a strict need-to-know basis.

### IV.1. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

**Program:** Name, Address, Phone, Website, Email

**Owners:** Name, Address, Phone, Email

**Primary Program Contact During Review Process:** Name, Address, Phone, Email

### IV.2. PROGRAM QUESTIONNAIRE

#### IV.2.A Business Structure

- i. How many years has business been in operation?
- ii. Years of operation under present ownership/management?
- iii. Indicate if the business is a:

	Sole Proprietorship
	Partnership
	Corporation
	S Corporation
	Limited Liability Corporation (LLC)
	Non-Profit
	Other

- iv. Provide copy of current business license

*The AMGA standards for accredited programs are that the business is appropriately incorporated or formed, is properly recorded and maintained, and that the necessary licenses for operations are in place and current.*

**IV.2.B Permit/Licenses and Land Management**

i. List the following:

- Areas of operation (name and location)
- Type of permit issued for each area of operation:

	NPS Concession
	NPS CUA
	NPS SUP
	USFS Priority Use
	USFS Temporary Use
	BLM Special Recreation
	Other

- Name and *email* for each permit manager or landowner.

ii. Provide copies of permits. (It is not necessary to send a copy of the entire document. Only the page that indicates the type of permit, the activities permitted, and that the permit is current need be sent.)

*The AMGA standards for accredited programs are that the business has secured permission to use public or private lands; that operating permits are current; that the business operates in compliance with the terms of permit; that the business will maintain a good working relationship with all governmental agencies in areas of operation where commercial guiding is regulated.*

**IV.2.C Insurance**

i. Provide proof of general liability insurance coverage. Documents provided should clearly indicate that the policy is:

- Current;
- Covers all program activities, including international trips;
- Indicates amounts of per occurrence/aggregate coverage.

ii. List any additional insurance policies or endorsements pertaining to the operation of the business (e.g. program’s vehicle insurance, professional liability insurance, rescue insurance etc.)

*The AMGA standards for accredited programs are that the business has secured general liability insurance; said insurance provides coverage for all activities the business engages in; that it is current; that it is in effect in all areas of operations; that it meets the requirements of local, state, and national agencies.*

**IV.2.D Marketing**

i. Indicate marketing tools utilized (check all that apply; Option Key+V):

	Ads in magazine/periodicals (provide name of publications)
	Website (provide web address)
	Catalogs/brochures/takeaways (provide copies)
	Social Media: Facebook
	Twitter
	Blog
	Other?

*The AMGA standards for accredited programs are that marketing materials accurately describe the services offered and the nature of the activities so that potential clients can make informed choices; that the type and level of staff certifications are accurately presented; that use of the AMGA logo is in compliance with the AMGA Brand Use Policy.*

#### **IV.2.E Client Screening and Registration**

i. How are potential clients screened to ensure that they are appropriate for a given activity?

- If an application is used, provide a copy or provide a link to the form.
- If a medical screening form is used, provide a copy or provide a link to the form.

ii. Describe how confidential information provided by clients on application and/or medical screening forms is managed. How long are documents kept on file; where are they stored; who has access to them?

iii. Are individuals under the age of 18 allowed to participate on programs?

*The AMGA standards for accredited programs are that clients are adequately screened prior to participation in courses or climbs; that the information is made available to the appropriate field staff; that client confidentiality is maintained; that records are properly maintained.*

#### **IV.2.F Equipment**

i. Describe the program's maintenance, documentation, and retirement policies for equipment.

ii. Does the program rent technical climbing or skiing equipment to clients or the general public? If yes, provide copy of rental form.

*The AMGA standards for accredited programs are that all equipment is used, maintained, and retired in compliance with the manufacturers recommendations; that a system is in place to monitor equipment use; that clients are properly equipped.*

#### **IV.2.G Risk Management**

i. Provide a copy of the release of liability or acknowledgement of risk form used for programs.

ii. Does the organization have a written risk management or incident management plan? If yes, provide a copy or indicate where that information can be found

iii. Is there a clear serious injury and death response procedure written? If yes, indicate where that information can be found.

iv. Briefly describe the emergency communication plan established to facilitate rescue and medical service for all areas of operation or indicate where that information can be found.

v. Has the program had any accidents or near misses under the current ownership or management? If so, explain.

*The AMGA standards for accredited programs are that clients are informed of the risks associated with the activities they will be engaged in; that there are policies and guidelines in place to mitigate risk and that staff are well acquainted with said policies and procedures; that incident management plans are in place for all areas of operations; that staff have appropriate and current emergency medical training and credentials.*

#### **IV.2.H Environmental**

i. List any Leave No Trace trainings attended.

*The AMGA standards for accredited programs are that they will conduct guiding and instructional activities with the highest regard for environmental impact and will practice and teach the concepts of leave no trace ethics.*

#### **IV.2.I Conclusion**

i. Please list any concerns, ideas, and specific recommendations for changes to the Accreditation Program or the review process?

## V. SUPPORTING DOCUMENT CHECKLIST

Please include all applicable documents with the Accreditation Self Assessment Questionnaire.

	Accreditation Review Fee
	Completed Accreditation Self Assessment Questionnaire
	Copies of Commercial Use Permits
	Copy of General Liability Insurance
	Copy of Motor Vehicle Insurance Policy (if applicable)
	Copy of current business license
	Names, title, and email address for applicable land management agencies
	Copy of printed marketing materials
	Copy of Release of Liability/Acknowledge of Risk form
	Copy of Equipment Rental form (if applicable)
	Copy of Medical Screening form
	Risk/Incident Management Plan
	Copy of current wilderness emergency medical care certificate and CPR card
	Client equipment lists
	Copy of SOAP note