

Operating Code

National Standards Commission

(July 2008, Updated September 2012, Updated April, Approved by NSC August 2013)

I. Establishment:

- A. The National Standards Commission (NSC) is an Operational Commission established by the Board of Directors.
- B. The authority of the NSC is defined by Board Governance Policy 15 and Executive Limitation 14.
- C. The NSC is an on-going body operating at the will of the Board.

II. Purpose and Goals:

- A. The overall purpose of the National Standards Commission is to develop, monitor, and implement an accreditation program for the ACA that achieves the ends of the organization, resulting in higher quality camp experiences and a greater understanding of and support for the value of the camp experience with both internal and external audiences. The standards of the American Camp Association Accreditation Program are an education tool focusing on health, safety and risk management.
- B. The goal of the NSC is to provide leadership that assures that the accreditation program maintains rigor and integrity while being accessible to as many camps as possible, within the financial and human resources available. The goal is achieved in partnership with the staff through these steps:
 - i. DEVELOP specific standards and a process for accreditation:
 - Proactively review trends that affect the camp experience.
 - Gather information and knowledge from related bodies and authoritative sources.
 - Understand the role of accreditation in increasing the quality and value of the camp experience.
 - Create a system for applying the standards in a consistent manner, establishing the criteria for making a standard mandatory.
 - Create a format for the accreditation process that will be accessible to an increasing number of camps.
 - Create effective educational tools to support the accreditation program at the local and site level working with internal and external resources.
 - Create new standards and/or accreditation designations to meet emerging needs.
 - Create effective training materials and events to prepare volunteers and staff at every level to carry out the program in a consistent manner.

- ii. IMPLEMENT the accreditation program :
 - Establish a process for recruiting, training and supporting volunteers to carry out the program.
 - Develop, monitor, and revise as appropriate the policies to maintain consistency in the program.
 - Provide opportunities for feedback from the field regarding the existing program as well as new needs.
 - Determine the scoring criteria and process.
 - Provide input for the priorities regarding the application of human and financial resources to the program.
 - Conduct appeals and make final decisions regarding accreditation status.
 - Review and update all parts of the program as required to achieve the outcomes.
 - Champion the values of the accreditation program to the camp and youth development community. Articulate the role the standards program plays in increasing the quality and value of the camp experience.

- iii. MONITOR the accreditation program :
 - Assure that the program is being administered consistently through the analysis of statistical data, observation of trends or other methods.
 - Listen and respond to feedback from the internal and external resources regarding the effectiveness of the program.
 - Compare the standards to emerging trends.
 - Add, delete, clarify and /or revise standards as needed.
 - Assess the ways in which accreditation increases the quality and value of the camp experience.
 - Assess the effectiveness of the educational tools and training programs and adjust as needed.

- iv. EVALUATE the achievement of the program goals:
 - Review the program to ensure that it remains relevant in a quickly changing environment.
 - Continually monitor emerging trends to determine how the standards and process need to be updated.

III. Organization

- A. The CEO appoints 8-10 Commission members and a chair to serve for staggered three-year terms of service. Members are selected to bring specific skills, including a strong knowledge of the ACA accreditation program and/or other accreditation systems, knowledge of the camp industry and camp culture, critical thinking ability, linkage to ACA and other professional bodies.
- B. The NSC maintains a diverse membership to provide as broad a perspective as possible regarding regional differences, varieties of camps, age and gender, and related professions.

- C. Recommendation for candidates for membership shall be solicited from the ACA membership through requests from Local Leadership, other NSC members, and Standards Chairs.
- D. Selection of members shall be recommended by the Chairperson, in consultation with the Director of Standards. Approval and final appointment is made by the CEO.
- E. Commission membership shall be in staggered terms. Members shall serve for a term of three years, but shall not serve for more than two consecutive terms.
- F. Vacancies may be filled for the unexpired term. The last compiled list of recommendations may be used.
- G. The CEO appoints a staff liaison(s) who serves as a non-voting, ex-officio member of the Commission.
- H. Appointment to the Commission will be made in the /spring with the new members beginning their term in September. Outgoing members will serve through August as needed.

IV. Operating Principles

- A. Conflict of Interest: (this is a board policy and may not be revised in any manner)
The Commission/Committee/Task Force commits itself and its members to ethical, businesslike, and lawful conduct, including proper use of authority and appropriate decorum when acting as Commission/Committee/Task Force members. Accordingly:
 - 1. Members must represent unconflicted loyalty to the interests of the Association. This responsibility supersedes any conflicting loyalty such as that to advocacy or interest groups and membership on other Boards, Committees or staffs. It also supersedes the personal interest of any member acting as a consumer of the Association's services.
 - 2. Members must avoid conflict of interest with respect to their Commission responsibility.
 - i. When the Commission is to decide upon an issue about which a member has an unavoidable conflict of interest, that member shall absent herself or himself without comment from not only the vote but also from the deliberation.
 - ii. Commission members must not use their positions to obtain employment for them, family members, or close associates. Should a member desire employment, he or she must first resign.
 - 3. Commission members may not attempt to exercise individual authority over the Association except as explicitly set forth in Board policies. Commission Members' interactions with public, press or other entities must recognize the same limitation and the inability of any Commission member to speak for the Commission except to repeat explicitly stated Commission decisions.
 - 4. Commission Members will respect the confidentiality appropriate to issues of a sensitive nature.

B. Authority:

1. The Commission may not speak or act for the Association except when formally given such authority for specific and time-limited purposes.
2. Commission business shall be conducted only at officially called meetings of committees.
3. When a committee/Commission or task force is established, a written charge shall be made which identifies the committee's work product and the specific decision-making authority given.
4. Except as defined in written Commission Charge, no Commission has authority to commit the funds or resources of the Association.

V. Meetings:

- A. The NSC meets in-person at least once annually (generally in September) and via conference call to attend to business the rest of the year. A regular electronic meeting will be held in January, with additional calls approximately quarterly and/or as needed.
- B. According to ACA policy, meetings will not be scheduled in conflict with major religious observations including but not limited to: Good Friday, Passover*, Easter, Rosh Hashanah (two days)* Yom Kippur*, Christmas* *observance begins evening before.
- C. Decisions related to formal accreditation and policy decisions of the Commission will generally follow a modified version of *Roberts Rules of Order*. Other decisions are made by consensus.
- D. Notes and minutes of all Commission meetings are the responsibility of the staff liaison. Summary notes will be distributed to the Commission, ideally within one month of the meeting. Official minutes of the NSC shall be archived for reference and historical purposes.

VI. Operations:

- A. The budget for the NSC will be prepared by the staff, based on priorities requested by the NSC.
- B. The work of the Commission is regularly reported to the CEO by the staff liaison, and is directly reported by the NSC upon request.
- C. The NSC Staff Liaison works closely with both the Commission Chair and the Commission members to ensure the work of the commission is completed in the appropriate time frame.
- D. The NSC will develop procedures and guidelines for the implementation of the accreditation program at the local and national levels and include them in an operation manual called the *Standards Administration Manual (SAM)*.
- E. Tasks will be assigned to be the primary responsibility of the staff, commission members or as a joint effort. These responsibilities will be clearly defined during the meetings (in person or via phone).

- F. The Staff Liaison will consult with the Commission Chair on issues of concern that arise between scheduled meetings.
- G. Revision of the Code shall be made by majority vote of the Commission and shall be submitted to the CEO for ratification

ACA National Standards Commission Procedural Information

(Supplement to the Operating Code)

August 2011, Updated September 2012, August 2013

The National Standards Commission (NSC) is charged with the responsibility for the overall development and administration of the ACA's Accreditation Program as described in the Operating Code. As members of the NSC assume their responsibilities, it is critical to understand both the formal charge from the Board of Directors and CEO, and the procedures and practices that have developed over time to enable the body to complete its work effectively. This document supplements the Operating Code with additional historical context and procedural details.

A significant challenge for the NSC is to be continually aware of the changing environments in which camps operate and to adapt the standards to maintain the rigor and integrity of the process. The NSC has made many adjustments in recent years in response to emerging issues. For example, for many decades, standards were added to the accreditation process by or for special groups (such as persons with developmental disabilities, with special needs, with chronic diseases, etc.) or for specific program concerns such as day camps, family camps, aquatics, etc. While this approach was logical as it began, the instrument began to resemble a patchwork quilt.

It became clear that it was not feasible to develop standards for each specialized group, but rather the NSC must address these special concerns in a conceptual manner broadly applicable to most camps. Thus, the NSC maintains dialogue with as broad a spectrum of camp groups as possible, understanding their special concerns, and incorporating their needs into the standards for all camps.

In developing an educational/assessment tool that is broadly applicable to most camps, it is necessary to address desirable practices common to the organized camping experience. ACA, through its collaboration with special purpose groups, continues to improve its general standards to help all camps be more cognizant of their responsibility to meet individual needs in a responsible manner. The NSC seeks input from a variety of outside sources to identify critical issues and concerns, and to seek technical and professional assistance in developing program responses to these matters.

Organizational Commitment: What it takes from the organization to operate an accreditation program.

1. Commitment to Ongoing Research
 - a. An accrediting body must continually be involved in formal research to validate the reliability and validity of its accreditation instrument. This requires expertise on the National Standards Commission and funding to provide for the conduct and analysis of the research.
2. Commitment to Input
 - a. Standards such as ours require input from a broad spectrum of both internal (camp) and external (i.e. parents, authoritative sources, gov't entities) audiences in order to respond to

contemporary needs and expectations with a reasonably assessable or accessible program. .

3. Commitment to Training
 - a. A national accreditation program demands a uniform training curriculum and uniform criteria for persons serving in instructional and leadership roles (such as visitors and instructors).
4. Systems for Handling Complaints and Providing “Due Process”
 - a. ACA must provide the camp director and the visitor with opportunities to deal with possible inequities in the system. A review process (local level) and an appeals process (national level) provide a means for addressing this type of concern.
5. Systems and Personnel to Administer the Accreditation Instrument
 - a. Currently over one-fifth of our membership (about 1,350 people) is involved at some level in the accreditation program - visitors, instructors, standards chairs, National Standards Commission, etc. Keeping this key portion of our membership trained, involved, up-to-date, and appreciated is critical to the integrity of the program and association.
6. Commitment to Continual Review of Policies/Procedures by Legal Counsel
 - a. It is necessary for ACA to have legal counsel review the requirements of our standards and the overall direction of our policies and programs on a regular basis.
7. Maintaining Relationships with Other Accrediting Bodies
 - a. ACA maintains relationships with a number of accrediting organizations and bodies. A group of like organizations share ideas, bring concerns, and explore answers and questions about our common dilemmas. This interaction has proved invaluable in helping each of the organizations determine common practice in our “industry” of operating an accreditation program.
8. Maintaining Relationships with Organizations in Allied Fields
 - a. ACA strives to keep current with staff and trends in organizations such as the Academy of Pediatrics, American Red Cross, Centers for Disease Control, Consumer Product Safety Commission, State Boards of Health, National Safety Council, and other organization with a focus on youth development (Girl Scouts, YMCA, Boy Scouts, etc.). Such interchange is necessary to keep our standards up to date with other entities.

Guidelines and Established Procedures for the NSC

1. The NSC will maintain a standards document (available for both print and digital format) that contains all current standards with contextual education and basic information on the accreditation process. It shall be considered official; and, therefore, any corrections, deletions, or additions to the standards must be recommended by the NSC and approved by the National Board.

A manual of policies, procedures, and recommended practices shall also be maintained (Standards Administration Manual). Since this manual contains the official policies and procedures, all content shall be approved by the NSC. The manual shall be disseminated to local office personnel concerned with standards and to other bodies of ACA as necessary. It shall be the specific responsibility of the staff person assigned to Standards to correlate the manual with other ACA documents, trainings, practices, etc.

2. The Chairperson, in consultation with the staff person, is responsible to make interpretations and rulings on special standards situations on behalf of the NSC in the interim between meetings, and to report a summary of such actions to the NSC at the next meeting for review and ratification. Issues and/or questions that arise related to changes in standards or policy will always be referred to the NSC.
3. The Chairperson and staff person shall seek from other ACA groups their concerns and actions related to standards, and in turn, share NSC concerns and actions with these other related ACA groups. In general, these are the guidelines for communication:
 - NSC members communicate with Standards Chairs a couple times a year to solicit their thoughts and feelings on the program and potential challenges/issues. This information is shared with all at one of the meetings.
 - ACA staff communicates on a regular basis with both local office staff and appropriate volunteers regarding administrative tasks and updates. This is done via email as well as hosting fall and spring conference calls.
 - ACA staff, on behalf of the NSC, communicates as necessary with the entire membership regarding major items of interests in the area of standards. This communication ranges from a letter sent to all ACA members, to notices in the weekly email blast to articles in *Camping Magazine*.
4. The NSC shall establish and follow procedures for quality control among the visitation personnel through, but not limited to:
 - Establishing criteria for the training and updating of Trainers.
 - Establishing criteria and procedures for the training and performance evaluation of instructors, visitors, and associate visitor.
 - Establish a system by which to monitor and address the feedback provided
5. The NSC shall conduct a continuing evaluation of the validity of the Standards, and the effectiveness of the visitation process. This will be accomplished by reviewing scoring trends (most of missed standards), local office visit performance (meeting the 90% compliance in number of camps visited and number of camps visited with two visitors), questions/comments from camps and visitors, etc.

Scoring

The accreditation scoring system is based on a confidential weighting system, and should not be shared beyond the NSC. The NSC assigns standards to levels; numerical values are assigned to those levels; typical scenarios are tested to validate the effectiveness of the system; the computer is programmed and the weights are never discussed.

Scoring Levels are as follows:

- #1 Seems commonly accepted as a minimum performance level. Often governed by other sources (state law, county inspections, etc.).
- #2 Would be commonly accepted as above the minimum level. Practices that begin to address quality or safety concerns. Failure to do it would affect health/safety and/or program quality.

- #3 Practices that have significant impact on (“raise the bar”) safety or quality in camp operations. Failure to do it would result in unsafe practices or poor quality program or services.
- #4 Critical to health and safety -- MANDATORY standards. Not really a level, as mandatory standards are not weighted.

Legal Implications of being an accrediting body

According to the ACA insurance underwriters, “A Warranty of Fitness” is a program that offers an actual or implied warranty that something (or someone) is “fit.” The old Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval was a warranty of fitness. It was an assurance that the consumer would be satisfied that the product was what it claimed to be and would perform acceptably.

ACA Accreditation is not a warranty of fitness. It is **not** a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. ACA does not give double-your-money back if parents are not satisfied. The accreditation program is an **educational** program, not a licensing agent. ACA, Inc. does not have the authority to close anyone down. National Standards Commission members have the responsibility to remind members, the public, and themselves that accreditation is voluntary. Accreditation **can** be a strong public indicator of a camp’s commitment to being aware of and being measured by the “standards of the industry.” But it is not a guarantee of safety or quality.

With increased litigation against accrediting bodies, policies and standards must be established with due care and implemented in a reasonable manner.

1. Accreditation is one of the two programs that “exposes” ACA to the greatest potential risk in terms of litigation. (The other is ethics which is being reviewed. Accreditation is by far the most “public” of these two areas.)

There have been suits against ACA’s accreditation program in the past. The association was successful in obtaining a summary judgment in a 1989 suit. In a 1993-94 suit, ACA successfully demonstrated to the plaintiff that it had no duty in that situation and the suit was “dismissed without prejudice.” A third suit in 1994-95 was settled between the plaintiff and the camp with no formal action against the Association.

2. Nevertheless, the scope of the program which involves approximately 1350 volunteers and includes activities occurring in approximately 2500 accredited camps – provides potential risk.
3. There is increasing litigation in society against accrediting and certifying bodies. To date, suits for negligence have not been successful against those who did exercise due care in establishing standards and administering them.

Steps Being Taken in Risk Reduction

1. Review of all standards, policies, and current procedures by legal counsel (ICE MILLER of Indianapolis).
2. Policy and procedural revision and/or development in the following areas:
 - a. Visitor protection (e.g. ICA policy, score form retention, record keeping policies, how the standards are worded, training, etc.).

- b. Protection of the Association (e.g. disclaimers, strengthening of the Statement of Compliance, policies on removal of accreditation, strengthening of the review and appeal process, etc.)
3. Bring our policies in line, as appropriate, with those of other accrediting bodies.
4. Have our standards reviewed by other professional bodies (American Red Cross, Centers for Disease Control, etc.) to ascertain that they are consistent with current professional recommendations and/or practice.
5. Work with legal and insurance counsel to identify appropriate risk reduction steps.

Insurance Coverage

The Association has two forms of coverage for Board members: its general liability coverage and Director's and Officer's Liability Coverage (D and O). No board, per se, has been specifically named in the two suits against the ACA standards program. Because both of them were personal injury situations (campers injured in an accredited camp), the Association's liability coverage was in place to handle those claims.

Expert Witness Requests

NSC members are not permitted to serve as an expert witness while serving on the NSC. Expert witness requests coming to any level of the Association may be forwarded to the National Office for review and action in compliance with procedures established with legal counsel.