

# Heli-Ski U.S. Guide Qualification Guidelines

## Level I – Associate Guides:

**Defined:** Associate Guides are guide trainees, apprentice and/or assistant guides and tail guides. Unless in the immediate company of a Level II or Level III Guide, Associate Guides cannot lead a group of skiers or riders except on meeting the requirements for a Qualifying Associate Guide as set forth in this section.

### **Training Pre-Requisites & Essential Skills:**

- **Snow Safety & Weather:** An Associate Guide should hold: Level II Certificate issued by the American Avalanche Institute (AAI), American Institute for Avalanche Research and Education (AIARE), Level I Certificate issued by the Canadian Avalanche Association or equivalent certificate issued by a recognized sanctioning body.
  - **An Associate Guide should be able to demonstrate:**
    - A basic understanding of mountain weather as it pertains to avalanches, aviation, and mountaineering.
    - A basic understanding of avalanche hazard evaluation and mitigation.
    - Ability to successfully search for multiple buried avalanche beacons.
    - Knowledge of avalanche rescue principles and techniques sufficient to act as hasty search leader or fill other rescue roles as directed.
  
- **Emergency Medical Care, Rescue and Evacuation:** An Associate Guide should hold one of the following emergency medical certifications: Wilderness First Responder (WFR), Outdoor Emergency Care Technician (OEC), Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) or Wilderness Emergency Medical Technician (WEMT). Higher, professional certifications may be substituted – i.e. Paramedic, Physician’s Assistant, Nurse, Nurse Practitioner or Physician, provided that his/her area of practice or training includes emergency work.
  - **Additional Training or Experience.**
    - Basic life support skills and certification (valid American Red Cross *CPR for the Professional Rescuer* or American Heart Association *Health Care Provider BLS* certification), and training in proper use of Automated External Defibrillators (AED).
    - Technical rescue training or experience as a ski patroller or other mountain rescue technician. Formal training should include basics of technical extrication, stabilization, evacuation, and transportation of sick and/or injured patients, pertinent to the terrain and conditions likely to be encountered within a given operation.

- **Operations & Emergency Planning:** An Associate Guide should have a substantial knowledge of the Helicopter Skiing Operation’s Safety and Operations Plan and its Emergency Manual and should be able to demonstrate:
  - Basic competence in normal operating procedures used in the Helicopter Skiing Operation.
  - A thorough knowledge of the procedures used for loading and unloading guests and their equipment in a helicopter and the ability to supervise guests while loading and unloading.
  - A clear understanding of the Outfitter’s Emergency Manual and the ability to implement an emergency response through communication of the essential facts of an emergency to the appropriate persons within the organization, as specified in the Emergency Manual.
- **Winter Backcountry Travel and Skiing/Riding Skills:** An Associate Guide should be able to demonstrate or provide evidence of:
  - Expert skiing and/or snowboarding skills, including the ability to carry a heavy backpack and/or other equipment (skis, poles or rescue gear).
  - Basic competence in route finding, navigation, map and compass use.
  - Competence in winter camping and survival skills.
  - Substantial experience in winter backcountry travel and skiing/riding.

## **Qualifying Associate Guides.**

**Defined:** Provided that their activities should be monitored and closely supervised by a Lead Guide, Associate Guides may lead a Group (and therefore be a “Qualifying Associate Guide”) if they have demonstrated competency in all relevant guiding skills to the satisfaction of a Lead Guide and have additional experience and training set forth in this section. All runs, Landing Zones and Pick-up Zones utilized by a Qualifying Associate Guide and Group should require approval by the Lead Guide.

### **Experience Requirements:**

The point at which an Associate Guide is able to lead a Group is dependent on individual aptitudes and experience. For example, a ski patroller with several years of active participation in an avalanche forecasting and mitigation program may be capable of leading a group safely after only a few days of tail guide training and a patroller coming from a resort with no avalanche program might never reach that threshold. With the understanding that the Lead Guide must make the final determination, suggested guidelines for Qualifying Associate Guide experience are:

- Twenty (20) days of on-snow guiding experience with a Helicopter Skiing Operation as a tail guide under the direct supervision of a Guide; or
- Fifteen (15) days of on-snow guiding experience with a Helicopter Skiing Operation as a tail guide under the direct supervision of a Guide and successful completion an appropriate Mechanized Ski Guide course.

- Ten (10) days of on-snow guiding experience with a Helicopter Skiing Operation as a tail guide under the direct supervision of a Guide and successful completion of the AMGA Aspirant exam or equivalent examination sponsored by another recognized sanctioning body.
- Ten (10) days of on-snow guiding experience with a Helicopter Skiing Operation as a tail guide under the direct supervision of a Guide and at least 30 days of on-snow guiding experience with a back-country skiing guide service or similar operation. Up to five (5) days of an appropriate Mechanized Ski Guide course may be substituted for back-country guiding experience.
- Ten (10) days of on-snow guiding experience with a Helicopter Skiing Operation and five (5) or more years' active participation in an avalanche forecasting and mitigation program with a professional ski patrol.

**Training Prerequisites & Essential Skills.** Qualifying Associate Guides should be able to demonstrate:

- **Training:** In addition to the training and skills required for an Associate Guide, he/she should have completed the Operator's internal annual operations, safety and emergency training.
- **Snow Safety & Weather:**
  - An understanding of mountain weather as it pertains to avalanches, aviation, and mountaineering.
  - An understanding of avalanche hazard evaluation and mitigation through route selection and hazard avoidance.
  - The ability to successfully search for multiple buried avalanche beacons.
  - The ability to organize an avalanche rescue.
- **Operations & Emergency Planning:** A Qualifying Associate Guide should have:
  - A thorough understanding of the Outfitter's Emergency Manual.
  - The ability to implement an emergency medical/trauma response and to organize a field rescue, search or evacuation.
- **Guiding / Interpersonal Skills:** A Qualifying Associate guide should possess:
  - The ability to effectively communicate with others involved in the Helicopter Skiing Operation orally, by radio, telephone and face-to-face communication and through written material.
  - The ability to communicate essential information to skiers/riders in a clear and concise manner.
  - Fundamental interpersonal skills that build teamwork within the Helicopter Skiing Operation and relationships with clients.

## **Level II – Guides:**

**Defined:** Level II Guides are able to lead groups of helicopter skiers under the supervision of a Lead Guide. Guides generally have the capacity to select runs, Landing Zones & Pick-up Zones within an area selected or approved by the Lead Guide for that date or time-frame. In addition to the skills, training, knowledge and experience of Level I Qualifying Associate Guides, Level II Guides should be able to demonstrate and/or document the experience, skills and training described in this section.

### **Experience Requirements:**

Minimum of 20 *additional* days of on-snow guiding experience, in at least two ski seasons, with a Helicopter Skiing Operation.

**Training Pre-Requisites & Essential Skills.** Level II Guides should be able to demonstrate:

- **Weather, Avalanches and Snow Safety.**
  - Additional participation in formal avalanche courses, seminars, workshops or training sessions and/or continued employment as a snow safety technician with frequent and regular participation in avalanche control and/or snow safety work.
  - Effective January 1, 2019 Level II Guides must have must hold a Level III Certificate (or then current equivalent certification) issued by the American Avalanche Institute (AAI), American Institute for Avalanche Research and Education (AIARE), AVPRO by American Avalanche Association (AAA), Level II Professional Operations Certificate issued by the Canadian Avalanche Association or equivalent certificate issued by a recognized sanctioning body.
  - A thorough understanding of mountain weather as it pertains to avalanches, aviation and backcountry winter recreation.
  - The ability to evaluate weather conditions and make recommendations and/or decisions regarding the effects of weather on heli-skiing operations.
  - Knowledge of and skill in the observation and recording of avalanche activity and in the gathering and recording of weather, avalanche and snowpack data.
  - A thorough understanding of avalanche hazard evaluation and mitigation, including knowledge of navigation and route finding in avalanche terrain.
  - Knowledge and understanding of use of avalanche rescue beacons sufficient to prepare and present orientations and training for others.
  - Knowledge of avalanche rescue principles, procedures, and techniques sufficient to act as accident site commander or incident commander and to fill other leadership roles specified in the Outfitter's Emergency Manual during an avalanche rescue.
- **Emergency Medical Care, Rescue and Evacuation.**
  - Recurrent training and continuing certifications of emergency medical credentials as described for Associate Guides.
  - Valid American Red Cross *CPR for the Professional Rescuer* or American Heart Association *Health Care Provider BLS* certification and AED training.

- Continued experience and/or training in technical extrication, stabilization, evacuation, and transportation of sick and/or injured patients, pertinent to the terrain and conditions likely to be encountered within a given operation.
  - The ability to fill a leadership role in the assessment, extrication, stabilization, evacuation and transportation of sick or injured patients.
  - Knowledge of the Outfitter's policies and procedures regarding emergency medical care, rescue and evacuation, including risk management procedures.
  - Thorough knowledge of the Outfitter's Emergency Manual, including available rescue resources (equipment, manpower, EMS and agency contacts).
- **Winter Backcountry Travel and Skiing/Riding Skills:**
    - Continued development of skiing and/or snowboarding skills with the objective of achieving high-level expert skills in all terrain relevant to the Helicopter Skiing Operation.
    - The ability to demonstrate and teach intermediate level skiing and/or snowboarding techniques.
    - Continued experience and development of expertise in winter backcountry travel and recreation.
    - The ability to teach and demonstrate expertise in route finding, navigation, map and compass use.
    - The ability to teach and demonstrate expertise in winter camping and survival skills.
- **Knowledge of Operations:**
    - The Helicopter Skiing Operation's Operating Area, including permit boundaries, no-fly zones, restricted use zones, peaks and other landmarks and drainages and runs where operations are regularly conducted.
    - The conditions of any permits under which a particular operation is conducted.
    - The location of emergency evacuation routes, equipment caches and other pertinent matters relating to emergency operations.
    - Emergency shut-down procedures for helicopters used by the Helicopter Skiing Operation.
    - The location and general contents of the emergency packs specified in the company's Emergency Manual.
    - Local terrain, climate and weather patterns, snowpack, and surface snow conditions.
    - The policies and procedures of a particular Helicopter-Skiing Operation, including but not limited to procedures for regular or standard operations, custom or special operations and emergency operations.
    - An understanding of interactions with, and impacts upon recreationists and other land users.
    - The company's guidelines and/or procedures for selecting and preparing landing zones.
    - The procedures for communications between guides, pilots, base stations, and others.
    - Understanding of the content of safety briefings and the ability to prepare and present safety briefings and training sessions for clients and other employees of the Helicopter Skiing Operation.
    - A basic understanding of business and operating costs of a particular Helicopter Skiing Operation.

- **Guiding & Interpersonal Skills:**
- Public speaking and group management skills, including the ability to deliver safety briefings and demonstrations to clients, utilizing checklists and other media the Outfitter may utilize.
- Continued development of the “soft” interpersonal skills used in guiding Helicopter Skiing clients.
- Continued development of the ability to communicate effectively and work closely with co-workers in the Helicopter Skiing Operation, including the ability to provide effective supervision of portions of the operation.
- Basic conflict resolution skills to help assure continued communication of pertinent safety and operations information by and between co-workers, pilots, guides and clients.
- The ability to evaluate guests’ needs and lead them to the best, most appropriate snow and terrain available at a given time, considering each group’s impact on other groups within the same operation.
- Understanding of and ability to mitigate environmental impacts and impacts upon communities and other backcountry users.

## **Level III – Lead Guides:**

**Defined:** Level III guides are Lead Guides or supervisors, able to lead groups of helicopter skiers without supervision and to oversee the activities of all groups operating from a single helicopter. Level III Guides are viewed as leaders, both within and outside of a Helicopter Skiing Operation and it is anticipated that, over time, they will become instructors in one or more of the disciplines germane to Helicopter Skiing. In addition to the skills, knowledge, education, and experience of Level I and Level II guides, Level III guides should be able to demonstrate and/or document the experience, skills and training described in this section.

### **Experience Requirements:**

Minimum of 40 *additional* days of on-snow guiding experience, in at least two ski seasons, with a Helicopter Skiing Operation.

**Training Pre-Requisites & Essential Skills.** Level III Guides should be able to demonstrate/hold:

- **Weather, Avalanches, and Snow Safety:**
  - A Level III Certificate (or then current equivalent certification) issued by the American Avalanche Institute (AAI), American Institute for Avalanche Research and Education (AIARE), AVPRO by American Avalanche Association (AAA), Level II Professional Operations Certificate issued by the Canadian Avalanche Association or equivalent certificate issued by a recognized sanctioning body.
  - Ongoing participation in formal avalanche courses, seminars, workshops or instructor courses, and/or continued employment as a snow safety technician with frequent and regular participation in avalanche control and snow safety work.
  - A thorough understanding of, and the ability to access and utilize, information and data for the forecasting of mountain weather and avalanche hazard.
  - A thorough understanding of, and the ability to supervise, avalanche hazard evaluation and mitigation for a heli-skiing operation.
  - Knowledge of, and the ability to supervise, the observation and recording of avalanche activity and the gathering and recording of weather, avalanche, and snowpack data.
  - Knowledge of avalanche rescue principles, procedures, and techniques sufficient to prepare and present briefings and training sessions and to fill any leadership role during an avalanche rescue.
- **Emergency Medical Care, Rescue, and Evacuation:**
  - Recurrent training and continuing certifications of emergency medical credentials as described for Associate Guides and Guides.
  - Valid American Red Cross *CPR for the Professional Rescuer* or American Heart Association *Health Care Provider BLS* certification and AED training.
  - Continued experience and/or training, and the ability to provide training, in technical extrication, stabilization, evacuation, and transportation of sick and/or injured patients, pertinent to the terrain and conditions likely to be encountered within a given operation.

- Thorough knowledge of all available rescue resources.
- Understanding of the relationships between the Helicopter Skiing Operation and other entities (Forest Service, BLM, States, landowners, Law Enforcement, EMS) as they pertain to rescue and evacuation of injured persons and participation in other Search and Rescue (SAR) events.
- **Winter Backcountry Travel and Skiing/Riding Skills:**

Continued pursuit of the development of high level expert skills in skiing and/or snowboarding; the ability to accurately and objectively evaluate the skills of others; and the ability to provide training in a wide range of those skills.
- **Helicopter Skiing Operations:**
  - Knowledge of the policies and procedures of a particular Helicopter Skiing Operation including, but not limited to, procedures for regular or standard operations, custom or special operations, and emergency operations; and the ability to supervise others in the implementation of those policies and procedures.
  - A thorough knowledge of the Operating Area, including Permit Boundaries, No-Fly and Restricted Use areas, major landmarks, emergency evacuation routes and aviation hazards.
  - A thorough knowledge of areas of operation, peaks, drainages, runs, climate, weather, snowpack, and surface snow conditions.
  - A thorough knowledge of the conditions of any permits under which a particular operation is conducted, and the ability to supervise and direct operations in accordance with those permits.
  - An understanding of interactions between and impacts upon different groups within a Helicopter Skiing Operation and the ability to supervise operations in such a way as to minimize internal conflicts and negative impacts upon recreationists and other land users.
  - Knowledge of and the ability to instruct others on procedures for communications between guides, pilots, and other participants in the Helicopter Skiing Operation and the ability to direct the flow and improve the efficacy of those communications
  - Knowledge, understanding and ability sufficient to prepare and present safety briefings and training sessions for other employees of the Helicopter Skiing Operation.
  - A reasonable understanding of the operating costs associated with a particular Helicopter Skiing Operation and the ability to conduct operations in a businesslike manner while maintaining safety as a priority.
- **Guiding / Interpersonal Skills**
  - Continued development of public speaking and group management skills.
  - Continued development of the “soft” interpersonal skills used in guiding Helicopter Skiing clients.
  - Continued development of the ability to communicate effectively and work closely with co-workers in the Helicopter Skiing Operation, while filling a supervisory role.
  - Experience, education and training contributing to the development of the skills and knowledge involved in managing the field operations of a helicopter skiing business.
  - Advanced conflict resolution skills.
  - The ability to manage and supervise heli-skiing operations, using feedback from other team members, to provide guests with the best possible experience on a given day, while simultaneously paying attention to safety and the business aspects of the Helicopter Skiing Operation.