



# Rafting Volunteer Handbook

*"If I can do this I can do anything"*



# Contents

- Mission ..... 4
- Contact Information..... 5
- Hours of Operation ..... 5
- Location, Directions & Parking..... 5
- Introduction: ..... 6
- NAC Programs: ..... 6
- General Consideration for Populations on Programming ..... 7
- Volunteer Policies and Expectations..... 7
  - Required Forms..... 7
  - Mandatory Criteria..... 8
  - Confidentiality..... 8
  - Reliability..... 9
  - Volunteer Expectations..... 9
  - Volunteer Benefits ..... 9
- Moab Policies..... 10
  - River Safety Rules..... 10
- Trip Structure ..... 10
  - River Locations..... 10
- Training ..... 11
  - Crew Training ..... 11
  - Desolation Guide Training..... 11
  - Prior Experience ..... 11
- Volunteer Roles and Opportunities ..... 12
  - Crew ..... 12
  - Guide..... 12
  - Trip Preparation or Gear Maintenance..... 13
- Scheduling..... 13
- Cancellation Policy ..... 14
  - If YOU Need to Cancel..... 14
  - If WE Need to Cancel ..... 14
- Emergency Procedures ..... 14

|   |    |
|---|----|
| General Risk Management.....                            | 14 |
| Volunteer Injury .....                                  | 14 |
| Incident Reports.....                                   | 14 |
| Resources.....  | 15 |
| Being a Guide (Roles and Responsibilities) .....        | 15 |
| Utah State Parks Check Out Requirements for Guides..... | 16 |
| River Log Example .....                                 | 16 |
| NAC's Whitewater Guide Check Out.....                   | 17 |

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# Rafting Volunteer Handbook

**Welcome** to the National Ability Center Rafting Program! More than 2/3 of all NAC adaptive rafting trips are supported by volunteers. Simply put, the program would not be able to function without volunteers like you! We are incredibly thankful that you choose to spend your valuable time with us! Thank you!

Volunteer training and development is an ongoing process. A willingness to learn and contribute is crucial. We hope you arrive excited to learn more with each visit, perhaps teach others what you already know, and always leave feeling valued. We encourage questions, suggestions, and fresh ideas. In return, we promise to provide you with as much support as we possibly can!

This handbook has been compiled by National Ability Center staff to help navigate the intricacies of volunteering in the rafting program at the National Ability Center.

## Mission

**The National Ability Center empowers individuals of all abilities by building self-esteem, confidence and lifetime skills through sport, recreation and educational programs.**

## Vision

Our vision is to inspire individual achievement and create a global impact for people of all abilities.

## Leadership

The National Ability Center fosters leaders who embody our mission, vision and core values. Leadership is the capacity to influence human thought, emotion and behavior starting with my own.

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## Hours of Operation

The National Ability Center Rafting Program operates from April to September in Moab, Utah. The NAC Rafting Program provides adaptive rafting seven days a week out of our southern base. While staff members are often in the office morning until evening, we ask that you consider our office hours to be 8am-6pm.

## Location, Directions & Parking

The National Ability Center Rafting base is located at 610 Cermak Street Moab, Utah and is around 4 hours from Salt Lake City.

### *Coming from Salt Lake:*

- Head on I-15 South
- Take exit 257B-A Towards Price
- Continue onto US-6E
- Merge onto I-70E
- Take exit 182 for US-191 towards Moab
- Once you enter town look for “The Rock Shop” on your left-hand side. Cermak Street is located directly after the shop’s parking and is a tight hair-pin turn.
- The guide house is yellow with a red door. Please park in the house parking.

## Introduction:

The Rafting Program is the National Ability Center's southern program in Moab, Utah. In 1977 the first accessible rafting trips in Utah were launched under the leadership of Martha Ham and the dynamic and essential engagement of volunteers from the river running community. These initial expeditions were made possible by the crucial sponsorship of commercial river outfitter, Ken Sleight. Ham went on to incorporate Splore (Special Populations Learning Outdoor Recreation and Education) and gain outfitter status for the organization on the Colorado and Green Rivers with the blessings of the iconic Sleight. Over the years Splore expanded to offer year-round programming including climbing, canoeing and cross-country skiing programs.

The National Ability Center is an adaptive organization that was founded on the slopes of Park City Mountain Resort in 1985. The NAC was started by Meeche White and Pete Badewitz. In the 1990's the NAC paved the way for adaptive competitions, hosting the first Huntsman Cup and traveled to the Special Olympics in Austria. In 1996 the NAC moved its headquarters onto the property it stands on today, a 26-acre ranch in Quinn's Junction, Park City. With the ranch, the NAC was able to add an abundance of adaptive programs to their repertoire including hippotherapy, mountain biking and many more.

In 2017 The National Ability Center and Splore decided on a partnership so that adaptive recreation of all kinds could be under one umbrella. Since then Splore and the NAC have been continuing to push the adaptive nation forward!

Our guides are dedicated to helping individuals grow and develop their independent potential. We use specialized adaptive rafting equipment, supportive and caring volunteers, and a team of dedicated staff; both in front of, and behind the scenes.

## NAC Programs:

NAC programs and activities are classified into program "pillars" to support the widest range of interests, skill levels and abilities:

***Adventure and Groups Programs:*** River rafting; rock climbing (outdoor); mountain biking; camping; hiking and walking; Community partner activities and leisure skills; health and wellness retreats; high and low ropes course; sports and recreation activities; and team building activities.

***Recreation Programs:*** Alpine skiing, ski biking and snowboarding; aquatics; archery; cross-country skiing/biathlon; camping; cycling; equestrian (adaptive horseback riding, equine facilitated learning and hippotherapy); hiking and walking; rock climbing (indoor); sled hockey; and water sports (water skiing, wakeboarding, canoeing, kayaking, stand up paddle boarding).

**Training and Education Programs:** International programs; conferences; internship programs; corporate retreats; outreach and in-service presentations; and ability awareness training.

**Competition Programs and Events:** Training teams for the Paralympics in Alpine skiing and adaptive snowboarding; Team Flyers training for individuals with intellectual and cognitive disabilities in ski, snowboard, cycling, and aquatics; Summit Challenge cycling event, Ability Snow challenge ski and snowboard event, Paratriathlon camps, Huntsman Cup International Paralympic Committee sanctioned alpine competition.

**Military and Groups:** Recreational, rehabilitative, and therapeutic programs to service members and their families; ongoing lessons, specialized camps, mobile programs and adaptive wilderness expeditions.

**Camps and Community:** Summer camps, winter camps and adaptive sports camps throughout the year; build relationships and learn new skills for all populations and age.

## General Consideration for Populations on Programming

We use the Person First Language at the National Ability Center. Focusing on ability and respecting the person for what they can do. Treat each person as an individual and be aware of specific characteristics of each population. All staff will be respectful in all communication skills to meet the needs of our stakeholders. Being aware of tone of voice, body language and location of conversations are very important in showing respect and understanding.

1. Foul language is offensive to many of our participants and is not appropriate for an office setting
2. No aggressive behavior like yelling, using excessively loud voices and be aware of respecting personal space
3. Drugs, alcohol and smoking are prohibited around participants. Refrain from conversations about these items with participants as well.

\*All concerns about specific populations should be brought to your supervisor immediately.

## Volunteer Policies and Expectations

To volunteer for the National Ability Center Rafting Program, volunteers must attend either Desolation Guide Training, Crew Training or have verifiable (class III or above) rafting experience.

### Required Forms

*Prior to working with our participants, volunteers must complete:*

- Online volunteer profile
- Background check
- Confidentiality agreement\*

- Liability waiver\*
- Media consent/non-consent form\*

\*Must be updated annually

### **Mandatory Criteria**

- Volunteers must be at least 18 years old.
- Volunteers must attend Ability Awareness Training.
- Volunteers must attend the trainings for the roles they select.
- It is essential that volunteers are reliable and punctual.
- Volunteers are expected to respect our rules and policies. Always inquire with our staff members if you are unclear as to what those are or have any questions.
- Volunteers need to be able to adapt to change and be flexible.
- Volunteers should be committed to learning and following all safety rules, risk management policies, and emergency procedures.

The best volunteers are relaxed yet attentive to their surroundings. They ask questions and strive to learn more and become more proficient by attending further trainings. They can perform their roles without direct supervision. They are always watchful of the participant, instructor, and potentially dangerous situations. And, of course, having a positive and friendly attitude is always a help to the participants as well as all those working with you!

### **Physical Fitness**

*Volunteers assisting in our adaptive trips need to be able help carry loads up to 50lbs.*

Volunteers assisting on trips that are utilizing adaptive equipment must be able to help the guides lift the participant in and out of equipment, and in and out of the raft. *Most of the work is done outdoors, in the direct sun, and temperatures can regularly exceed 100 degrees.*

If you have physical limitations that prevent you from meeting these requirements, please let us know, we have many other volunteer opportunities outside of rafting. Please make sure you are signing up for roles suitable to your abilities.

### **Confidentiality**

The National Ability Center maintains a strict policy of confidentiality. All volunteers are asked to respect our participants privacy, and to please be sensitive when sharing your volunteer experiences with friends and family. If you feel compelled to share powerful experiences you have had while volunteering here please leave the names, as well as other identifying facts, out of the story to protect the confidentiality of our participants. This also pertains to the personal information of other volunteers and staff members.



During trips, your guide may disclose certain information with you about the participant you are working with; please keep in mind, it is on a need-to-know basis.

## **Reliability**

You are extremely important to the successful operation of our program. Many of our trips could not proceed without the support of our volunteers. *We depend on you to be punctual, dependable, and to attempt to meet the schedule to which you have agreed.*

## **Volunteer Expectations**

While acting as a volunteer on river trips with the National Ability Center, volunteers must adhere to the same guidelines as paid guides, which include:

- Have a clear understanding of basic river risk management.
- Use the NAC's equipment and only bringing personal watercraft when approved by the program manager.
- Dress appropriately; clothing in good repair, shirts must be worn at all times, and shorts must be an appropriate length.
- Follow the instructions and schedule of the trip leader.
- Participate in boat ramp rigging or de-rigging with the guides, both if possible.
- Use proper personal hygiene while in the kitchen and at river camps.
- Avoid the use of inappropriate language.
- Ask questions when unclear about protocols or instructions.

Please consider the weather when packing. For safety and for comfort, please:

- Come prepared for all weather types, dress in or pack layers.
- Wear a NAC Volunteer T-Shirt the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the rafting trip.
- Do not forget to cover up in the sun, wear sunscreen and stay hydrated.

## **Volunteer Benefits**

Volunteers who have volunteered at least once the same year are welcome to borrow rafting equipment to take on the Fisher Towers section of river. Manager's may use their discretion for other sections of river. Volunteers must adhere to the same gear borrowing policies as staff.

Volunteers who assist as either crew or guides for 3 or more days will be offered a free ACA Swiftwater Rescue 2 day course through the NAC. Courses will take place once a year. If you are not available for the course that year you will be invited to the following year's course. The course covers individual and team skills, risk management, knots, mechanical advantage systems and more.

## Moab Policies

1. Moab office hours of are 8am-6pm daily.
2. The Moab location consists of, a boathouse, a guide house, and an office. Volunteers are welcome to stay on property the night before and after a trip when volunteering. Please be respectful of the guides that live in the house full time.
3. The best place to park is at the very top of street at the old Elk's Lodge (we own this property). *Please do not park along Cermak street as it makes it very difficult for us to back up our trucks and trailers.*

## River Safety Rules

*Rafting carries inherent risks! As a National Ability Center Volunteer, it is your responsibility to know and follow the protocols and procedures. Every trip starts out with a safety talk from the Trip Leader. It is your responsibility to listen to the full safety talk. The main points are:*

1. Drink water.
2. Wear sunscreen.
3. Always wear your PFD when on the raft or swimming.
4. Shoes must always be worn, including at lunch and in the raft.
5. Never attempt to stand up in the river.
6. Watch your step getting in and out of the boat and at lunch. The bank can be uneven and slippery.
7. Do not pick up, play with, or frighten wildlife.
8. No one is allowed to dive out of the boat or perform back flips. All exiting the boat must be done feet first.
9. Pee in the river.
10. Practice Leave No Trace.

Please remember that while you are on the river in a National Ability Center raft or borrowing gear from the NAC, you are a representative of our organization. Reports of unsafe river activities from the BLM or other rafting companies will result in evaluation of your status as a volunteer with the National Ability Center.

## Trip Structure

The Rafting Program offers eight different trips and experiences that utilize volunteers. These trips range from 1 day to 6 days and take place all over Utah and Western Colorado. We ask volunteers to expect to stay as late as 2 hours after the participants leave to help load gear from the boats to our trailers. *All our trips take off from our Moab Location.*

## River Locations

The meeting location for your trip will be listed in the sign up and in your reminder email for that trip. We will also give your information to the Trip Leader (with your consent) before the trip so that you can coordinate directly.

- Fisher Towers: Class II (1-3 days)
- Westwater Canyon: Class III (2 days)
- Ruby Horsethief Canyon: Class I (3 days)
- Ruby Horsethief and Westwater Canyon: Class I-III (4-5 days)
- Gates of Lodore: Class IV (4 days)
- Labyrinth Canyon: Class I (4-5 days)
- Cataract Canyon: Class V (5 days)
- Desolation Canyon: Class III (5-6 days)

\*For detailed information on each section [AmericanWhitewater.org](http://AmericanWhitewater.org) is a great resource.

## Training

### Crew Training

This training is geared towards volunteers who do not want to guide a raft on their own or who want to experience a few of our trips before they commit to Desolation Guide training. This training encompasses, ability awareness, transfer training, an overview of our volunteer process, and rafting policies and procedures.

When: Online, Google Classroom.

### Desolation Guide Training

This is the NAC's 6 day/5-night customized guide training on Desolation Canyon. Volunteers and new staff will guide everything from ripples to class III rapids under the guidance of an experienced raft guide. Most interactions during the day will be one on one. At night we will have classroom style discussions on risk management, hydrology, ability awareness/transfer training and an intro to swiftwater rescue. This course is packed with whitewater knowledge. Our goal is for volunteers and new staff to come out of this course ready for their check off run on our class II section of whitewater. There is a small fee associated with this course. Please contact the Program Manager with any questions or to sign up.

When: Once a year. Six days in May.

### Prior Experience

Many of our volunteers come to us with prior expedition river rafting experience. If these volunteers have verifiable class III or above guiding experience, they may possibly skip the guide training. We ask that these volunteers come on an overnight rafting trip as a crew volunteer first. This will serve as their familiarization with our policies and procedures. These individuals can complete a check-out run after the familiarization run. These volunteers will need to obtain their ability awareness training prior to checking out. Check with the Program Manager if you have prior experience that you think would expedite your check out procedure.

## Volunteer Roles and Opportunities

To ensure safety in the Rafting Program, we ask volunteers to pursue roles that are within their skill levels. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to gain more experience and training to help them advance.

### Crew

Supervisor: Program Manager and Trip Leaders

Purpose of Position: Crew help the guides conduct a successful and fun trip. They assist with transfers, cooking meals, and interact with the participants. Assistants may also be asked to help with prepping or putting away gear and equipment at our base in Moab. We encourage crew volunteers to practice guiding a raft with an experienced and checked out NAC employee in the raft.

Time Commitment: 1 to 6 days. We typically meet crew volunteers along with participants at the take-out the morning of the trip.

Minimum Qualifications:

- NAC Crew Training **OR** NAC Desolation Guide Training **OR** verifiable expedition rafting experience
- Ability Awareness Training through the NAC
- Utah State Food Handlers
  - <https://www.statefoodsafety.com/food-handler/utah-food-handler-permit>

***\*Crew volunteers must wear our participant PFD unless they have all the guide requirements (listed below) and the Program Manager's approval. This is a State of Utah DNR policy.***

### Guide

Supervisor: Program Manager and Trip Leaders

Purpose of Position: Guides will be rowing or paddle guiding their own raft with participants on sections they are checked off on. Guide's help assist with transfers, cooking meals, and interaction with the participants. Guides may be asked to help with prepping or putting away gear and equipment at our base in Moab.

Time Commitment: 1 to 6 days. We ask that guide volunteers commit to helping with either rigging (the night before the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the trip) or derigging (the afternoon of the last day of the trip) at our boathouse in Moab.

Minimum Qualifications:

- Desolation Guide Training **OR** verifiable class III boating experience
- Ability Awareness Training through the NAC
- CPR/AED
- First Aid
- River log – up to date (within 30 days) \*See resources at end of doc. for example
- Utah State Food Handlers
  - <https://www.statefoodsafety.com/food-handler/utah-food-handler-permit>

Required safety gear guide volunteers must obtain to check out:

- 2 locking carabineers
- 10ft of 1" tubular webbing
- Type III or V PFD
- Folding or blunt tip knife
- Whistle
- Watch or timekeeper
- Shoes with an ankle strap (no flip-flops)

*\*Volunteer Guides follow the same check out procedure as our staffed guides. See the resources section at the end of this handbook for our full check out procedure.*

*\*\*All guide volunteers must volunteer on 1 Fisher Tower daily or overnight before volunteering for a larger/longer trip.*

### **Trip Preparation or Gear Maintenance**

Supervisor: Program Manager and Operations Manager

Purpose of Position: Help with moving gear from the boathouse to vehicles or food packing. Or help with repairing tents, sleeping bags, stoves.

Time Commitment: Varies. Dependent on tasks, and project needs.

Minimum Qualifications: Ability Awareness Training.

## **Scheduling**

### **Where and How to Sign Up = Volunteer Portal!**

Each of you will have a personalized portal where you can (and should) update:

- Your personal information
- Availability
- Certifications
- See your upcoming volunteer opportunities
- Cancel shifts if you not able to make it
- View and sign up for upcoming shifts in programs you are trained in and trainings if interested in other programs
- View and sign up for upcoming events
- Track your volunteer hours

If you have any questions on how to sign up using the volunteer portal don't hesitate to reach out at [Volunteer@DiscoverNac.org](mailto:Volunteer@DiscoverNac.org).

**\*Please Remember to only sign up for volunteer roles that are within your abilities and that have received the appropriate training.**

## Cancellation Policy

Please remember that guides, participants, and managers all rely on you showing up on your scheduled day and at your scheduled time. If you sign up for a volunteer opportunity, we are counting on you to keep your commitment.

### If YOU Need to Cancel

We understand conflicts occur; we just ask that you inform us as soon as possible so we have enough time to find a suitable replacement.

- **If you know in advance that you will be missing your assigned volunteer time, please cancel your shift via your volunteer portal.**
- If you need to cancel less than 48 hours in advance of the trip, please CALL 801.895.7055 as soon as you know, so that we can try and find someone to fill in.

### If WE Need to Cancel

Occasionally trips may be cancelled due to weather, participant numbers decreasing or participant cancellation.

- If we know in advance (prior to 48 hours), the Program Manager will EMAIL you directly to inform you of those changes AND will cancel your shift via the volunteer portal.
- In the event of any last-minute cancellations (within 48 hours), the Program Manager will CALL you; if you do not pick up, he or she will leave a message and will email you as well (time permitting).

## Emergency Procedures

### General Risk Management

Volunteers are responsible for knowing and following all safety rules, emergency policies and procedures. During any emergency, volunteers should remain calm and follow the instructions given by our staff members.

### Volunteer Injury

1. If you believe you have hurt yourself while on a trip, let the TL know immediately!
2. Before you leave the trip fill out an incident report form and turn it in to the TL.

### Incident Reports

Guides must fill out an incident report for an incident of *any* kind, including but not limited to:

- Person exiting the raft unintentionally
- Anytime a med kit is opened for more than a Band-Aid
- Raft flip or pin
- Equipment damage

## Resources

### Being a Guide (Roles and Responsibilities)

- **Safety:** It is a guide's duty to relate the risks that are involved with whitewater rafting to the participants. We do this with a thorough safety talk and strategic questions. A guide's goal is to properly prepare our guests for situations that may arise and give them the skills and knowledge to protect themselves. On the river, a guide must be able to honestly evaluate their participant's abilities and recognize potential hurdles. It is the responsibility of all guides to make sure the participants understand the serious nature of the safety instructions. Make sure they pay attention!! All participant's perceptions are driven by the guides. Guide's should be safety conscious role models.
- **Strategic Questioning:** Interacting with the participants by asking specific questions is a great way to interpret their needs. It is acceptable to ask a participant their swimming capabilities or other questions that may help guides in the case of an incident.
- **Courtesy:** Courtesy should be shown not only to the guests and guides on your trip, but to other companies and private boaters, as well as other users of the river.
- **Entertainment:** The best way to entertain the participants is to do your job in a professional manner, with sincerity and enthusiasm. Try not to run the show the whole time and remember this is their vacation. Moments of silence are just as important as talking. Relax and give your participants time to take it all in. Make them feel that their trip is the best one ever.
- **Customer Appreciation:** Guides should go out of their way to make the participants feel like our family, because they are! Be sincere when saying "thank you".
- **Image:** The NAC company is made up of professionals, we are honest in dealing with our guests and we treat them like old friends. We take pride in the level of commitment to our training. We have the best equipment and we run the river with skill and high standards. **We are not like other companies; there truly is a difference!**
- **Self-Care:** We expect all our staff and volunteers to demonstrate good self-care while on our trips. Self-care can look different for each person. But by demonstrating how you take care of yourself; participants will be more likely to practice self-care themselves. Our multi day trips lend guide's to "be on" all the time. It is important for trip leaders to schedule time off for guides on trips longer than 2 days. On the river many guides bring personal drinks (nonalcohol) or snacks to enjoy away from participants. We highly encourage pacing yourself and speaking up when you need a break.





## NAC's Whitewater Guide Check Out

- **Fisher Towers:** All guides coming to the NAC for their first season will complete a check out run before guiding participants. This check out run will consist of the trainee guiding the entire section with an experienced guide present in the raft. The trainer will complete an evaluation and determine pass/fail (example below). Guides not yet checked-out on Fisher Towers can guide a gear boat on trips, if they have the Utah State Parks Boating Requirements.
- **Ruby/Horsethief and Labyrinth:** All guides checked off on Fisher Towers will automatically be checked off on our flat-water sections.
- **Desolation, Gates of Lodore, Cataract Canyon, Westwater:** After guides check out and show proficiency on Fisher Towers, they will be able to check out on the more difficult sections. The order for these is "See it, row it (with gear), row it with participants". No check out form will need to be filled out but there will be a general assessment of skills. The managers reserve the right to require guides to complete the first 2 steps more than once before checking out.

Below is an example of the checkout process the National Ability Center utilizes for both staff and volunteers. All staff and volunteers who are trained with the NAC or come to work/volunteer for us will have a check off run on the Fisher Towers (class II) rafting section. Guides scoring poor in 2 or more skills will require a second check out run later.

| Skills  | Poor | Good | Excellent | Trainer notes |
|---|------|------|-----------|---------------|
| Can conduct a thorough safety talk (paid staff only)  |      |      |           |               |
| Can demonstrate self-rescue                           |      |      |           |               |
| Can rescue a swimmer                                  |      |      |           |               |
| Can identify main current                             |      |      |           |               |
| Can identify features                                 |      |      |           |               |
| Shows good boat spacing                               |      |      |           |               |
| Understands ferry angles                              |      |      |           |               |
| Can move from an eddy to the current effectively      |      |      |           |               |
| Can square up to waves                                |      |      |           |               |
| Can back off obstacles                                |      |      |           |               |
| Shows an understanding of momentum                    |      |      |           |               |
| Can turn effectively                                  |      |      |           |               |
| Effectively uses hand signals to communicate          |      |      |           |               |
| Can right a flipped raft                              |      |      |           |               |
| Has required gear and knows how to use it             |      |      |           |               |
| Understands risk management                           |      |      |           |               |
| Communicates with participants effectively            |      |      |           |               |
| Shows comprehension of basic local knowledge (interp) |      |      |           |               |



*Thank you for being a part of the river magic  
- from the Splore/NAC Family*