

Essential Eligibility Criteria (EEC) & Service Animal Policy



Essential Eligibility Criteria

- Guidelines of the physical and cognitive skills needed for participation in Mountaineers programs.
 - Emphasis on guidelines, not policy.
- Framework to assess requests for accommodations.
- Supplementary to our [Clubwide Activity Standards](#) and the [Member Code of Ethics](#).
- Do not deny a request for accommodation without first contacting staff to discuss options and any related considerations.

- Please take a few minutes to review our [Essential Eligibility Criteria](#).



The Mountaineers values diversity – including persons with diverse abilities – in its programs. While we do not specialize in integrating persons with disabilities into our programs, we encourage people of all abilities to consider participating in Mountaineers programming. The Mountaineers Essential Eligibility Criteria, or EECs, provide a guideline of the physical and cognitive skills needed for participation in programs sponsored by The Mountaineers. These EECs are intended to be a resource for anyone considering participating in a Mountaineers program, and are not intended to be exclusionary.

In practice, The Mountaineers EEC are a tool to assess requests for accommodation. They provide staff and volunteers with a framework to ask objective questions about a person's abilities relative to the physical and cognitive skills required to participate in a certain program. The Mountaineers EECs are also designed to supplement our Clubwide Activity Standards – which outline the technical skill prerequisites for a given activity – and the Member Code of Ethics – which define our community expectations.

Prospective participants who have a question about their ability to meet an essential eligibility criteria should contact the activity leader for more information. If the activity leader has any questions or concerns about accommodating a prospective participant, they should contact Mountaineers staff before denying the request.

Trained Aides

- Must also meet the EECs and any activity prerequisites.
- Do not need to be paying members, but should complete a liability waiver.
 - Guest Membership
- Should be included on activity roster, but not required to pay for participation.
- Must be considered in the overall party size.
- The Mountaineers will provide trained aides on a case-by-case basis.
- In the case of ASL interpreters, accommodation may be required under law.
- Do not deny a request without consulting staff!



In some instances, a participant may require the assistance of a trained aid to meet one or more of the relevant EECs. Example of trained aids include service animals, ASL interpreters, and individuals trained to assist a participant with physical or communication requirements.

If a participant requires a trained aide to meet any of the relevant EECs, the participant or aide should notify the trip leader beforehand. The trained aide should also consult the relevant EECs to make sure that they meet the physical and cognitive requirements, as well as any additional prerequisites for the activity.

Trained aides do not need to be paying members of The Mountaineers, but they must fill out and complete a waiver and read and acknowledge all applicable rules and safety information before participating in any activity. This typically involves registering for a free Guest Membership.

At the time of registration, participants must ensure that there is sufficient space for both themselves and their trained aide on the activity roster. Because trained aides are present to support an individual with disability, they are not required to pay for participation.

If a participant would like to request that The Mountaineers provide a trained aide to support their participation in an activity, they should contact the leader with as much advance notice as possible, preferably at least one month in advance of the activity

start date. Please note that in the case of sign language interpreters, The Mountaineers may be required to provide this accommodation under law.

As always, do not deny any request without consulting staff. Get in touch with staff early if you have a request that you don't know how to support.

Funding

- Committees may choose to fund the services of a trained aide through their committee or branch budget.
- The Mountaineers also has funding available to all committees and branches through a centralized program budget.
- Please inquire with Mountaineers staff before committing funds from The Mountaineers program budget.
 - Staff reserve the right to deny requests from the program budget that are cost prohibitive to the organization.



The Mountaineers will provide trained aides (including ASL interpreters) on a case-by-case basis. If you need support contracting a trained aid, please contact Mountaineers staff for assistance. Committees may choose to fund the service of a trained aide through their committee or branch budget. The Mountaineers also has funding available to all committees and branches through a centralized program budget.

Please inquire with Mountaineers staff before committing funds from The Mountaineers program budget. The Mountaineers reserves the right to deny requests from the program budget that are cost prohibitive to the organization.

How-To Navigate Our EECs

Trips: Basic Field-Based EEC + Relevant Activity-Based EEC

Clinics: Basic Field-Based EEC + Relevant Activity-Based EEC

Seminars: Basic EEC

Field Trips: Basic Field-Based EEC + Relevant Activity-Based EEC

Lectures: Basic EEC

Events: Basic EEC



The Mountaineers essential eligibility criteria are broken into several sections.

Basic EECs cover the baseline physical and cognitive skills necessary for participation in an indoor activity, such as a seminar or lecture.

Basic Field-Based EECs cover the baseline physical and cognitive skills necessary for participation in any of our outdoor activities, such as trips and clinics.

Relevant Activity-Based EECs cover the physical and cognitive skills necessary for participation in a specific type of activity. For example, this includes independently turning face-up in the water for our sea kayaking and sailing programs, or the ability to independently travel over loose and unstable terrain for our alpine climbing and scrambling programs.

“Simple” Requests

- An individual who is hard of hearing who would like to reserve a front row seat for your upcoming lecture.
- An individual who wants to bring their parent, who is physically able but dealing with memory loss, on your upcoming hike.
- An individual with visual impairment who hikes frequently and plans to bring a trained aide along with them to your upcoming hike.
- An individual who independently uses a manual wheelchair and wants to join your hike to a barrier-free trail location.



Generally speaking, requests that don't require a change in volunteer ratios, the use of specialized equipment, or the allocation of any additional funds should be accommodated. When in doubt, volunteers should always contact staff for support, but our hope is that our leaders will use common courtesy to accommodate these types of requests.

“Complex” Requests

- An individual who is deaf would like to register for your evening leadership seminar.
- A long-time member with a history of memory loss who wants to register for your upcoming backpacking trip.
- An individual with visual impairment who wants to register for the Alpine Scrambling Course.
- An individual who independently uses a manual wheelchair and wants to register for the Basic Sea Kayaking Course.



Many of the requests that we receive aren't so simple. In the case of a complex or difficult request that you're unsure of how to accommodate, please contact staff for support. Do not deny any request without first consulting staff!

Service Animal Policy

- Compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Washington Law Against Discrimination (WLAD).
 - Emphasis on policy, not just guidelines.
- Please take a few minutes to review our [Service Animal Policy](#).



Unlike our Essential Eligibility Criteria, the Service Animal Policy is a policy document that helps to ensure that The Mountaineers programs are in compliance with the law. This document helps to answer questions about when service animals must be accommodated, when they might not be able to be accommodated, and what questions a Mountaineers volunteer or staff member may ask to guide a discussion with a prospective participant.

Defining a Service Animal

- Any dog or miniature horse that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability.
- Includes individuals with a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability.
- The work or tasks must be directly related to the individual's disability.
- Use of an animal for protection, safety, emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship does not qualify an animal as a service animal.



Under the Washington Law Against Discrimination, a service animal is defined as any dog or miniature horse that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. The work or tasks performed by the service animal must be directly related to the individual's disability. Under the law, use of an animal for protection, safety, emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship does not qualify an animal as a service animal.

Questions & Conversations

Staff and volunteers may ask:

1. Is the animal a service animal required because of a disability?
2. What work or task has the animal been trained to perform.

These questions may help staff or volunteers better differentiate between a service animal and an emotional support, therapy, comfort, or companion animal.



Under the law, staff and volunteers may only ask two specific questions about a participant's service animal: (1) is the animal a service animal required because of a disability, and (2) what work or task has the animal been trained to perform. These questions may help staff or volunteers better differentiate between a service animal and an emotional support, therapy, comfort, or companion animal.

The Mountaineers empowers leaders to have these conversations directly with participants. If the leader is unsure of the circumstances or has concerns about the service animal's participation in a Mountaineers program, they should contact Mountaineers staff for support.

Excluding Service Animals

May be excluded if:

- Participation would “fundamentally” alter the nature or safety of the program.
- Out of control and the handler does not take effective action to control it.
- Not housebroken.
- Behavior or actions constitute a risk to property or others.

Allergies and fear of animals are not valid reasons for denying access or refusing service to people using service animals.

Must offer the opportunity for the person to participate without the service animal.



The Mountaineers is not required to accommodate a service animal if accommodation would “fundamentally” alter the nature of the program or overrule legitimate safety requirements. In addition, a person may be asked to remove their service animal from the program if: (1) the animal is out of control and the handler does not take effective action to control it or, (2) the animal is not housebroken. Any behavior or actions that constitute a risk to property or others may also be grounds for refusal.

Please know that, according to the law, allergies and fear of dogs are not valid reasons for denying access or refusing service to people using service animals.

As always, if you're concerned about integrating a service animal into your program, please contact Mountaineers staff before denying the service animal's participation. In instances when a service animal cannot participate, The Mountaineers must offer the participant the opportunity to participate without the service animal - so long as they are able to continue meeting the relevant EECs. Staff or volunteers will not be responsible for the control and/or supervision of a participant's service animal at any time.

Pre-Trip Communication

- Leaders may notify participants that a service animal will be joining the program.
- If another participant chooses to cancel their participation because a service animal will be present, any registration fee will be refunded in full.



Leaders may notify activity participants that a service animal will be joining the activity or event. If another participant chooses to cancel their participation on that basis, any registration fee will be refunded in full.

Because The Mountaineers is a community of members, we encourage leaders to reach out to the person with the service animal and ask if they mind you notifying the group that a service animal will be present at the upcoming activity or event. If they are strongly against this for any reason, please contact Mountaineers staff for support.

Lodges

- Permitted at all Mountaineers properties, including our three public lodges.
- Guests must be provided the same opportunity to stay in any available bed.
 - May not be restricted to “pet-friendly” rooms or areas of the lodge.



Service animals are permitted in all Mountaineers properties, including our three public lodges. Guests with a disability who use a service animal must be provided the same opportunity to stay in any available bed, and they may not be restricted to “pet-friendly” rooms or areas of the lodge.

As with all of our programs, guests may not leave their service animal unattended in the lodge, and the service animal must be under the handler’s control at all times.

Questions?

- Please contact Sara Ramsay at sarar@mountaineers.org.



Thank you for taking the time to learn about The Mountaineers Essential Eligibility Criteria and Service Animal Policy. If you have any questions, please contact Sara Ramsay for additional information.