

Canadian Avalanche Association

CAA Membership Scope, Competencies and Proficiency

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**Canadian
Avalanche
Association**

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1. Background

The CAA's shift towards self-regulation began in 2014. Details of this process are outlined in the [Competency Profiles and Proficiency Scale for CAA Members](#). This document was initially created for Avalanche Practitioners and Avalanche Professionals. In 2023, the membership voted to introduce two new membership categories: Basic Avalanche Educator and Advanced Avalanche Educator. The membership committee and subject matter experts from the project development team worked to establish the competencies required for these new categories and align them with the profiles for the existing categories.

1.1 Shift Towards Self-Regulation

Self-regulation, in broad terms, is a system where a profession or group of practitioners defines standards of ethics, competency, practices and professionalism to ensure:

- the public, industry, and government understand what services members of an association provide and the standards by which those services are provided;
- that members commit to the ethics and standards of the association in their practice; and,
- that members can be held to those standards through membership audits or complaints brought against them.

One of the values of self-regulation is that the professional members of the association define the standards for membership rather than governments or their regulatory bodies.

After challenges with regulatory bodies defining avalanche practice for occupational health and safety regulations between 2009 and 2013, the CAA's board initiated a strong push towards self-regulation for defining CAA practices. This effort was designed to ensure CAA members defined avalanche practice for its members. While this approach was not without its risks, it has generally been successful. Governments, insurance companies and other external bodies generally look to the CAA to define competent avalanche practice. It is incumbent on the CAA to continually earn this trust by acting in the public interest as well as the interest of its members.

2. Conceptual Framework for the Competency Profiles

2.1 Fundamental Definitions

2.1.1 Competency

Within this document, a “competency” is defined as the ability to perform a job task to a specified level of proficiency under specified workplace conditions.

2.1.2 Competency Profile

The competency profile for a member category establishes the minimum set of abilities that a newly qualified member in the category is expected to bring to the workplace. It is understood that the profiles act as:

“snapshots” of the competencies of a member when entering a specific membership category. As discussed below in [Section 2.2 - Entry to Practice and Beyond](#), it is expected that for many individuals, their abilities will continue to develop after becoming members of the association.

Specifics for each competency profile and areas of overlap are addressed later in this document.

2.1.3 Workplace Conditions

2.1.3.a) Avalanche Practitioner and Avalanche Professional

Within the framework of competencies required to be a member of the CAA, supervision, and an existing program structure help to define the work environment those members may practice in. These parameters are of key importance in defining the Scope of Practice of CAA members.

At entry to practice, the Avalanche Practitioner functions within the following workplace conditions:

- A highly structured environment
- An established avalanche program
- Decision making subject to established protocols
- Consultation or supervisory review is readily available and utilized

At entry to practice, the Avalanche Professional functions within the following workplace conditions:

- A moderately structured environment
- An established or developing avalanche program
- Decision making subject to established protocols
- General direction provided

2.1.3.b) for Workplace Conditions for Avalanche Practitioners and Avalanche Professionals

At first glance, there appear to be several areas of overlap in the workplace conditions described above. Avalanche Practitioners and Avalanche Professionals will perform many of the same tasks. In general, the Avalanche Professional is expected to have a higher level of proficiency in those tasks. The Avalanche Professional also performs tasks with greater autonomy, in addition to having gained experience and a higher level of knowledge. To understand the level of proficiency required at the Avalanche Practitioner and Avalanche Professional membership levels, the proficiency scale described in [Section 2.1.4](#) must therefore be used together with the competency profiles. Lastly, it is important to understand the context of entry-level (Avalanche Practitioner) and professional (Avalanche Professional) workplace conditions, as explained next.

The following scenarios provide examples of Avalanche Practitioners and Avalanche Professionals at work. These examples are illustrations and are not meant to be exhaustive descriptions of the roles of Avalanche Practitioners and Avalanche Professionals with the CAA. A broader range of roles emerges when considering the proficiency scale below and the roles of members involved in advanced practice which may be required in many workplaces.

Examples:

An Avalanche Practitioner may have a significant, but junior role at a ski hill, recording observations of snow, weather, and avalanche phenomena. This member's training ensures the work is done to OGRS standards.

However, the Avalanche Practitioner successfully conducts his or her work through the support of the highly structured environment at the ski hill. The ski hill's existing avalanche program provides guardrails in the form of protocols that clearly limit what decisions the Avalanche Practitioner can make and clearly dictate the procedures to be followed. Within this context, the Avalanche Practitioner is also usually in contact with a supervisor several times per day for review and consultation on the Avalanche Practitioner's work.

An Avalanche Professional has greater latitude than the Avalanche Practitioner. The Avalanche Professional's additional training and experience allows moderate structure; the member may exercise judgement more frequently and may not always have supervision.

A different example of an Avalanche Professional's role might be as a team leader for avalanche safety at a snowmobile touring or cat skiing operation. The Avalanche Professional may be one of the program's daily operational leaders, making decisions about the daily activities, and supervising or training Avalanche Practitioners. General direction for the avalanche program may have been developed in consultation with a highly experienced specialist conducting an advanced practice ([See 2.1.4 below for details on advanced practice](#)).

2.1.3.b) Basic Avalanche Educator and Advanced Avalanche Educator

Avalanche Educators also have workplace conditions as described below. Unlike Avalanche Practitioners and Professionals, Avalanche Educators are limited to both to these workplace conditions and only providing education to recreationists. The limitations are explicitly detailed in [Guidelines for Instruction in Avalanche Terrain \(GIAT\)](#).

At entry to practice, the Basic Avalanche Educator functions within the following workplace conditions:

- A highly structured environment
- An established avalanche education program
- Decision making subject to established protocols and GIAT
- Under Supervision for all avalanche related activities

At entry to practice, the Advanced Avalanche Educator functions within the following workplace conditions:

- A moderately structured environment
- An established or developing avalanche education program
- Decision making subject to established protocols and GIAT
- General direction and supervision required

The following scenarios provide examples of Avalanche Educators in the workplace. These examples are illustrations and are not meant to be exhaustive descriptions of the roles of Avalanche educators.

Examples:

A Basic Avalanche Educator teaches an Avalanche Skills Training level 1 course, both field and classroom sessions, under a Provider. These members will teach in a highly structured environment and the Providers documentation, including Avalanche Safety Plan (ASP), GIAT, terrain atlas, and protocols, will set guard rails to ensure instruction takes place in simple or non avalanche terrain. Within this context, the Basic Avalanche Educator is also usually in contact with a supervisor at the start and end of the course for review and consultation on the course, the student and for mentoring with teaching and other skills.

An Advanced Avalanche Educator will have more latitude. They can teach a greater variety of courses, including Avalanche Skills Training 2 (AST2) and Managing Avalanche Terrain (MAT) in simple, challenging and sometimes complex terrain. The Advanced avalanche educators must remain with in GIAT, but there is a higher ability to make field based terrain decisions for the purpose of instruction. The Advanced Avalanche Educator is focused on instruction of the group and providing high quality avalanche education, this is not a guided trip.

2.1.4 Proficiency

2.1.4.a) Progression from Entry to Practice to Advanced Practice

The competency profile for a member category establishes the minimum set of abilities that a newly qualified member in the category is expected to bring to the workplace. As such, the profile may be considered to be a list of entry-to-practice abilities at the Avalanche Educator, Avalanche Practitioner or Avalanche Professional level. It is fundamental to the public interest to clearly describe these abilities, upon which employers and others may rely.

Equally fundamental, however, is the recognition that competencies evolve with workplace experience. Workers learn from their experience, from the guidance of more experienced colleagues, and from continuing education. Their competency sets and proficiency levels grow over time. Skills that workers regularly perform or for which they receive more guidance will grow more quickly than those practiced less frequently or with less support. This growth, along with training, enables members to progress from one membership category to the next and to focus on a particular practice area. For example, with experience, the proficiency of the Avalanche Practitioner in performing some tasks may approach that of the Avalanche Professional. Similarly, the proficiency of the Avalanche

Professional in frequently performed tasks may exceed the minimum Avalanche Professional proficiency defined in the previous section.

2.1.4.b Proficiency Scale

As previously mentioned, the level of proficiency expected of any member group is different from any other member category. The following table describes the level of knowledge, experience, autonomy, leadership, and communication that is expected of avalanche workers' competencies when beginning the various stages of their careers. While progressing between stages of their career, the proficiency level of members' competencies will evolve over time at varying rates.

CAA Member Proficiency Scale

	Non-Voting	Voting			
Level of Practice	Affiliate Member	Basic Avalanche Educator	Advanced Avalanche Educator	Avalanche Practitioner	Avalanche Professional
Education	- CAA Avalanche Operations Level 1 & prerequisites	- Avalanche Operations Level 1 & prerequisites - Introduction to Professionalism - Instructing in Avalanche Terrain—Foundations - Instructing in Avalanche Terrain—Basic	- Avalanche Operations Level 2 & prerequisites - Introduction to Professionalism - Instructing in Avalanche Terrain—Foundations - Instructing in Avalanche Terrain—Advanced	- Avalanche Operations Level 1 & prerequisites - Introduction to Professionalism	- Avalanche Operations Level 2 & prerequisites - Introduction to Professionalism
Proficiency Levels	Novice	Capable in Basic Avalanche Education (AST1, CRS)	Capable in Advanced Avalanche Education (AST2, MAT)	Competent	Proficient
Knowledge	Has been introduced to avalanche risk management, and its main processes, methods, and tools.	Knowledge of avalanche risk management tools for the purpose of delivering avalanche education in Simple Terrain.	Implements avalanche risk management tools for the purpose of delivering avalanche education in Simple and Challenging terrain. Demonstrates instructional strategies to deliver avalanche education.	Fundamental knowledge of avalanche risk management, and its main processes, methods, and tools	Good level of knowledge in all aspects of avalanche risk management, and all its processes, methods and tools.
Experience	Some experience shadowing, or as a junior employee	Completed educator courses, or equivalent experience.	Completed educator courses, or equivalent experience.	Understanding of daily processes and systems. Sufficient experience to perform recurrent activity.	Experienced in avalanche risk management. Able to perform routine tasks, as well as deal with irregular or unexpected occurrences.
Autonomy	Works in a highly structured program with established protocols. Performs basic routines under direct supervision. Not able to independently provide avalanche services.	Works autonomously to deliver curriculum under an established program and ASP.	Works autonomously to deliver curriculum under an established program and ASP. Makes risk management decisions	Works in a highly structured, program and with established protocols. Capable of performing standard tasks under readily available supervision. Works as part of a team, and provides information for and contributes to decision-making.	Works autonomously within an established program. Makes risk management decisions.
Leadership & Communication	Works under the leadership of an Avalanche Practitioner or Avalanche Professional. Capable of straightforward, clear communication.	Leads groups in simple terrain. Capable of effective communication and sound decision-making to deliver avalanche education.	Leads groups in simple or challenging terrain. Capable of effective communication and sound decision-making to deliver avalanche education.	Adept at straightforward clear communication. Developing leadership skills.	Leads operational decision-making processes and teams with confidence. Demonstrates consistent, appropriate, and highly functional communication and leadership skills
CPD Requirements*	Not required	20 points min. per year, and 60 CPD min. over three years	45 points min. per year, and 135 CPD min. over three years	60 points min. per year, and 180 CPD min. over three years	80 points min. per year, and 240 CPD min. over three years

3. Scope of Practice

Individual CAA Membership Categories come with a scope of practice. The scope of practice for each category *broadly* defines the range of activities and services a CAA member can reasonably perform. The Scope of Practice Statements below offer direction on whether a member can lead or participate in avalanche operations or education programs.

Given the breadth of avalanche operations, specific operation-level descriptions are not provided. The scope of practice statements are offered without consideration of additional certifications a member may have. It is recognized that a member who is also a provincially registered engineer, or a member of a guiding association may conduct a broader range of activities where those additional activities are overseen by other certifying bodies.

If a CAA member is uncertain whether they are practicing within their scope of practice, they are encouraged to contact the Chair of the CAA Membership Committee.

Avalanche Practitioner:

- a) Participate in the assessment and communication of avalanche risk
- b) Deliver avalanche risk education programs
- c) Operate within a program for managing avalanche risk
- d) Work under the supervision of an Avalanche Professional

Avalanche Professional:

- a) Develop, direct, and participate in the assessment and communication of avalanche risk
- b) Develop and deliver avalanche risk education programs
- c) Design and operate programs for managing avalanche risk
- d) Supervise Avalanche Practitioners and ensure their work meets professional standards

Avalanche Professionals maintain proficiency in most areas of practice and may specialize to obtain an expert level of proficiency in one or more areas, aligning with their education, training, or experience.

Basic Avalanche Educator:

- a) Able to teach introductory recreational avalanche education courses such as the [Avalanche Canada Training](#) program AST 1 and Companion Rescue Skills (CRS) courses;
- b) Work parameters are defined by the introductory level described within [Guidelines for Instruction in Avalanche Terrain](#);
- c) Restricted to travelling and teaching within Simple Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale terrain;
- d) Not recognized to provide avalanche services outside of the educational scope defined above

Advanced Avalanche Educator:

- a) Able to teach advanced recreational avalanche courses such as the [Avalanche Canada Training](#) program AST 2 and Managing Avalanche Terrain (MAT) courses;
- b) Work within the parameters defined by the advanced level described within [Guidelines for Instruction in Avalanche Terrain](#);
- c) are restricted to travel in Simple or Challenging ATES terrain;
- d) Not recognized to provide avalanche services outside of the educational scope defined above

4. Competency Profiles

The [Competency Assessment Information](#) document outlines the competencies required for each membership category and how they will be assessed. The [proficiency scale](#) explains the level of experience and understanding required for the different levels of membership.

The competencies are split into 8 domains:

1. Professionalism
2. Communication
3. Organization and Decision Making
4. Terrain Use
5. Managing Operational Avalanche Risk
6. Observing and Recording
7. Delivering Education
8. Emergency Response

5. Assessment Venues

The CAA competency profiles define the competencies members should have when entering a level of practice. They do not, however, prescribe *how* the CAA should assess applicants wishing to attain membership.

A gap analysis was undertaken to understand which assessment of member applicants could be addressed by the Industry Training Program (ITP) and what areas would require new methods of assessment.

Where ITP does not evaluate specific competencies, other assessment methods have been assigned. The result is the online *Professionalism in the Avalanche Industry* course and the Competency Portfolio. References are also required to attest to the knowledge of the applicant's proficiency in certain competencies.

The Competency Portfolio has been developed to provide applicants with a tool to capture and demonstrate their proficiency level of specific competencies using workplace experiences and evidence.

The competency profiles outlined in the Competency Assessment Information document show which assessment method is used to assess each required competency for Avalanche Educators, Avalanche Practitioners and Avalanche Professionals, as well as any pertinent information about the assessment.

The document outlines which competencies are only validated by a written answer from the applicant, while some require evidence or a reference validation as well.

As seen in the competency profiles, all competencies have “primary” assessment venues, while some competencies have both “primary” and “secondary” assessment venues. Secondary assessments are provided when two courses address a competency, or when a competency is considered critical and is assessed using a workplace portfolio as well as a course. In general, only the primary competency is used for assessment. The secondary assessment may be consulted if the assessment team requires additional information.

The following courses have been assessed for competency validation throughout the application process. Applicants will be required to provide relevant certificates at the time of application. If a certificate is a requirement for a membership category, applicants cannot use that course to further validate competencies.

- CAA Industry Training Program Courses
- Avalanche Search and Rescue Level 1
- Introduction to Avalanche Operations

- Avalanche Operations Level 1
- Avalanche Operations Level 2
- Avalanche Search and Rescue Level 2
- CAA Professionalism in the Avalanche Industry

The application process, including the competency portfolio, will be used to assess the competencies in Section 2.0- Communication.

Recognized Certification Process

The CAA recognizes certifications from other organizations when both organizations believe a significant portion of the required competencies are met on a different course. To qualify for the recognized certification process, you will need to hold a current membership with the association from which you are showing a qualification.

For the Avalanche Educators, this creates a direct application process where only course certificates and a reference are required to apply for membership.

For Practitioner and Professional Applications, this results in a modified competency portfolio where certain competencies are removed due to being met by a course at another organization.

The following certifications have been assessed for the application process:

- ACMG Ski Guide
- ACMG Alpine Guide
- ACMG Mountain Guide
- ACMG Apprentice Ski Guide
- ACMG Apprentice Alpine Guide
- CSGA Level 3
- CSGA Level 2
- CSGA Level 1
- CAA Avalanche Operations Level 2
- CAA Avalanche Search and Rescue Level 2
- CMBGA Level 3
- CMBGA Level 2