

Preparing a Manual for your Challenge Course

Writing your own manual that is specific to your needs.

Purpose/Mission Statement: Vision of your course. This gives overall direction to your course. A mission statement or vision statement should may or may not be the same as your organization's mission statement. It should give the course a direction to guide in the overall operation.

Curriculum Models

It is always good to have several curriculum models pending that caters to the group you are serving. Some models fit in to a larger curriculum such as with multi-day therapeutic wilderness programs, camp sessions, environmental education studies, semester long school based classes, organizational teambuilding, and retreats. No matter if the program is one day or multi-day, it is a good idea to create several model curriculums for different groups as a foundation. This does not mean that you have to follow these to the initiative. Programming that way does not enable creativity and growth for your program, staff and participants. Networking at conferences and other tower programs similar to yours will help you to discover new ways of teaching similar topics.

Initiatives with Safety considerations

A "how to" guide for initiatives is necessary for new staff as they are developing their skills. Many tower programs have high turn-over due to the seasonal nature of our industry. A list of initiatives posted near the equipment storage may be helpful for program coordinators as they are conducting programs. In addition, a list of initiatives with possible processing themes, potential questions, and safety concerns in the manual is an invaluable resource. At minimum, initiatives with related safety concerns will enhance your program manual.

The number of accidents (severe or not) is much greater than accidents happening once belayed in and climbing the challenge course. For this reason, an important point to cover is proper spotting techniques. Some of the best resources for spotting techniques are University Cheerleading Squads.

Staff hiring

This is a process that can heavily sway your program from being good to great. First of all, to hire great staff, you should have a plan of action. This may include recruiting college fairs, national publications, hiring from within organization, and/or ads. A system of hiring should involve an application, reference collecting, and interview(s). It is important to implement a system that will allow you to interview and hire great staff.

Job description will also be helpful in recruiting staff. They may be faxed or sent to organizations to “keep an eye out for this person” ad. Job description may be posted in a manual with the following material included:

- All positions listed
- Incumbent reports to who and is part of what organization
- Physical requirements (ex. must be able to be outside all day, must be able to lift 50lbs., must be able to perform rescues if needed)
- General Description of daily tasks
- Salary Range (optional for manual, helpful for recruiting)
- Requirements (ex. CPR, First Aid, WFA, WFR, challenge course experience, counseling or processing experience)

Training

Training is an ongoing process. A training plan needs to be in tact. Some general topics which could be included are:

- Belay and proper set-up
- Facilitation
- Rescue training
- Interpersonal training (body language, eye contact, communication, appearance)
- Medical Screening
- Skills sheet – Need to include checked off skills in their personnel file.

Retraining

ATI does not require courses to retrain through Alpine Towers every year to validate the quality of their staff. ATI feels that in the right circumstances, a mature tower manager can retrain their staff each year. However, a retraining is recommended if: 1) your program is experiencing high turnover in leadership staff, 2) tower ownership has changed, 3) a feeling of a need to re-energize staff, 4) program population has changed, or 5) it has been several years since the original retraining.

Evaluation

Evaluation of skills should be an on-going part of your training process. By evaluating staff through verbal, written and even video critique, staff will get a sense of their strengths and weaknesses. Evaluations should be objective and consistent with each other. Include in manual a copy of the evaluation guidelines so employees and facilitators will be cognizant of areas of importance to your organization.

Ratios

Staff to participant ratios should be reviewed and set by a risk management committee.

Emergency plans

Post emergency plans in areas of high visibility for staff (eg – storage barn, under action packer lid)

Include life threatening and non life threatening plans

Include exact written directions to read to advanced life systems

Identify who makes contacts and what contacts should be notified when an accident happens:

leadership on your staff, group leaders, family members, on site nurses, and advance life systems. Identify the order and have it clearly written out step 1, 2, and 3 of what to do.

Spell out who and what will happen with rest of group if accident occurs.

If your course is hard to locate, have one person in your organization meet advance life systems at the entrance of your property.

Have a communication device (walkie talkie, Nextel, cell phone, runner system)

Practice with Advance Life Systems your plan. Have them come out to your course. Have plans and directions to your course at local fire, police, and ambulance departments

Monthly Inspections

Include daily and monthly inspection sheet. Provide location of monthly inspection notebook so that staff can be aware of information in there.

Yearly Inspections

ACCT sets as a minimum standard an annual inspection of your challenge course. See article on Inspections for more detail.

Release Forms/Medical Forms

Copy of Release and medical form. Have a system in place on how to evaluate medical red flags (nurse/doctor on site, screening handbook)

Instructor Evaluation system

Include copy of evaluation instrument and frequency of evaluations.

Incident Report form/reports

Include copy of form nearby program. Have a section in separate handbook that keeps copies of all incidents. This can be helpful to discover trends. Instruct facilitators on what sort of information needs to be recorded in report.

First Aid Kit

- Contents
- Location
- How to use
- Needs to be on location during program

Rescue

- General and Specific
- Include technical drawings

Newsletter Information

Include resource information and where to find it.

Equipment Logs

- Ropes Logs
- Harness purchase logs
- Helmet purchase logs

This is a general list of items that can begin your staff manual. It is important to create a risk management committee and develop a manual that is useful to you.