



Founded in 1880, the American Canoe Association (ACA) is a national nonprofit organization serving the paddling public by providing education related to all aspects of paddling, stewardship support to help protect paddling environments, sanctioning of programs and events to promote paddlesport competition, exploration, and recreation.





Our mission: We build inclusive paddling communities, support excellence and foster safety and stewardship through education, competition, and recreation.

Our vision: Engage millions of paddlers with safe and healthy opportunities for challenge, learning, service, and enjoyment.



The ACA has over 15,000 members and 300 paddling clubs and affiliated organizations. ACA members reside in all 50 states and over 35 countries worldwide.

The heart of the ACA is the people who paddle, cherish and protect the rivers, lakes, streams, bays and oceans of the United States and beyond.

ACA provides paddlesports leadership, structure, and instructional resources to promote our sport's many health and social benefits to fuel membership growth and enrich the experience of all participants.

We believe every paddlesport participant has a right to define their path on the water, from fun recreational activities to elite athletic pursuits, and we share these core values:

Enjoyment: We develop programs, instruction, training camps, events, and competitions that provide a fun, satisfying, and rewarding experience for all. *We paddle because it is fun.*

Safety: We create tools, programs, policies, and procedures to ensure that safety is a top priority for all our members and other paddlesport participants. *Paddling is fun when we're safe and healthy.*

Inclusion: We promote a culture and atmosphere of honesty, camaraderie, and sportsmanship to enrich lives and unleash the full potential of all participants. We maintain an environment of respect, fairness, and kindness and embrace the value of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. *Everyone is welcome in the paddling family.*

Teamwork: We work collaboratively with our volunteers and partner organizations. We nurture connections throughout the paddlesport community and with the US Coast Guard, the US Olympic & Paralympic Committee, the International Canoe Federation, the Outdoor Alliance, and other partners. *We cannot achieve our mission alone.*

Excellence: We are committed to the pursuit of excellence at the individual, team, and organizational levels. We strive to provide the best possible service to our members and the paddling community. *We are accountable for how effectively we achieve that goal.*

A member-elected Board of Directors governs the American Canoe Association. The 15 directors have a wide range of skills and expertise, including legal, financial, environmental and boating safety, and live throughout the United States. Directors are elected for a 2-year term. Elections take place in the early fall, electronically and as part of the Annual Membership Meeting.

In addition to the Board of Directors, the Safety Education & Instruction Council, the Competition Council, and other standing and ad hoc committees and working groups serve in advisory role to the Board and can make policy recommendations for the Board to consider.

The Competition members of the ACA elect a Representative and Alternate Representative to the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee's Athlete Advisory Council. The representatives serve a 4-year term.

ACA members have general powers and authority to vote on and conduct certain affairs of the association as described in the Bylaws including changes to the Bylaws. All ACA members are encouraged to participate in the Annual Membership Meeting each fall.





The ACA National Paddlesports Instruction Program has been acknowledged as the premier paddlesports education program throughout the United States and in over 40 countries. Through the efforts of the ACA National Office and the Safety Education & Instruction Council (SEIC), course curricula and educational resources are developed and made available to the general public, instructors, partners, and the overarching outdoor industry.



- Training & Skill Development
- Assessment, Trip Leader & Instructor Certification
- Paddlesports Safety Facilitator Certification
- Community Leader Certification



Types of ACA Courses

Skills courses which are designed to introduce you to new skills, build confidence through competence, and increase paddling proficiency in your chosen craft.

Skills assessments are designed to evaluate your existing skillset. You should arrive at the course with previous paddling experience, and you will be evaluated alongside a checklist of skills, experience, and knowledge. If successfully completed, you will receive an assessment credential from the ACA.

Instructor certifications are the next step for individuals wishing to teach paddling technique and skill refinement to students. A key component that sets instructor certification apart from other course types is the evaluation of not only paddling skill and knowledge but also teaching ability, group management, and judgement.



Types of ACA Courses Continued...

Endorsements are specialized courses designed for currently certified ACA instructors. Endorsements provide the opportunity for instructors to teach additional skills and curriculum that are not included in traditional instructor certification workshops.

Paddlesports Safety Facilitator (PSF) courses are designed for those seeking to introduce paddlecraft safety and knowledge to the beginner paddler in a land-based setting. Learn more about the PSF program, [here](#).

Community Paddlesport Leader (CPL) courses explore and develop solutions to “big picture” paddling challenges including venue selection, group management, participant competency, and rescues across a variety of paddlecraft. These non-discipline specific courses train leaders that engage with the broader paddling community to provide safe, fun, paddling experiences at the entry level.

The ACA National Paddlesports Instruction Program offers education and instruction within the following disciplines:

- Flatwater Canoeing
- Touring/Freestyle Canoeing
- River/Whitewater Canoeing
- Recreational/Sit-on-Top Kayaking
- Sea/Coastal Kayaking
- River/Whitewater Kayaking
- Surf Kayaking
- Flatwater Stand Up Paddleboarding
- River/Whitewater Stand Up Paddleboarding
- Surf Stand Up Paddleboarding
- Coastal Stand Up Paddleboarding
- Paddle Rafting
- Oar Rafting
- Packrafting
- River Safety & Rescue/Swiftwater Rescue
- Universal Paddling



The ACA is committed to providing the youth of today and tomorrow with the opportunity of experiencing the outdoors via a canoe, kayak, stand up paddleboard, or raft.

We accomplish this goal through youth-centric educational resources, programming, and partnerships with organizations such as Boy Scouts USA, Sea Scouts BSA, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Outward Bound, and many others.





The ACA supports paddlesports recreation and exploration by sanctioning of thousands of events each year through insurance and risk management best practices, promotion, and building community connections.

One of the many benefits of being affiliated with the ACA is our ability to provide liability insurance for on-water events. The ACA's program provides excellent coverage from highly-rated insurance companies. It can be used for paddling in most classes of water, and is available at affordable rates that are competitive with other national providers.

- Outfitters, Liveries, and Guides
- Clubs & Organizations
- ACA Certified Instructors
- Hull (Personal Property)

The ACA is the voice of paddlers at the local, state, and federal levels on a range of public policy issues that affect paddlers, including: broader and more equitable access to public lands and waterways, life jacket wear regulations, paddlesports education standards, and waterway ecological health.



The ACA Regional Activity Council (RAC) provides a regional infrastructure of ACA volunteers at the regional, state, and local level to help connect paddlesports communities and join forces on projects related to safety, education and instruction, competition, public policy and stewardship, and recreation. These local ACA volunteers can often:

- Help paddlers find instruction or connect with instructor certification opportunities
- Promote competition, training, stewardship and community-based paddlesports events
- Build coalitions for paddler advocacy initiatives, and much more!



The ACA strives to be an association in which participants, members, guests, and the organizations they represent, feel a sense of belonging and are treated with dignity and respect. Our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is fundamental to our organization and organizational partnerships. We will continue working to decrease barriers, and increase access to paddling opportunities within communities that have been underrepresented and historically marginalized.



Leadership Exploration and Development (LEAD) Initiative: This is a program designed to train, educate, and develop people of color, and to help participants transform their local communities and provide representation in paddlesports. These goals will be achieved through a 4-day immersive course and ongoing mentorship.

Equity and Access Donation Fund: Developed to support ACA's commitment to expanding access to paddlesports. The fund aims to help remove financial barriers to participation for underrepresented groups or individuals to pursue paddling education, leadership development, competition, and/or instructor certification.



L.L.Bean Club Fostered Community Grant: Provides grant funding to ACA member organizations, clubs, and volunteer groups for their ongoing activities, projects, and programs which illustrate substantial and quantifiable efforts at inviting and including a diversity of new community members.



Since 2017, the ACA has proudly served as the National Governing Body (NGB) for the Olympic sports of Sprint & Slalom as well as the Paralympic sport of Paracanoe.



The ACA is committed to developing and promoting paddlesport athletic competition; we organize and manage paddlesport competitions for athletes of many skill levels including youth & beginner-friendly races to the selection of USA National Teams who compete on the international stage. As the National Representative to the International Canoe Federation (ICF) we support internationally recognized competitive paddling disciplines such as Sprint, Slalom, Paracanoe, Whitewater Freestyle, Surfski/Ocean Racing, Marathon, Wildwater, Dragonboat, and many others.



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