



## Introduction to the National Camp Accreditation Program

In 2013, the Boy Scouts of America will begin transitioning to the National Camp Accreditation Program (NCAP) to accredit council-organized camps for Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Varsity Scouts, and Venturers. Scouting's goal in this transition is summarized in the purpose of the NCAP:

*The purpose of the Boy Scouts of America's National Camp Accreditation Program is to help councils elevate camps to new levels of excellence in delivering Scouting's promise to youth. Councils will engage in a rigorous review of camps and properties, continuous improvement, and correction or elimination of substandard practices.*

This introduction outlines the major elements of the NCAP and the critical role that the council, area, and region will play in raising BSA camping to an ever higher level of performance.

### Elements of the NCAP

- The **national camp standards** provide for a consistently safe and quality camping and outdoor program for youth. The standards represent the *minimum* program that Scouting will deliver to youth who choose to participate in our program.
- The **application** challenges the council to convert the consistently safe and quality program required by the national camp standards into a good or great dynamic and relevant program by committing to concrete steps for quality and improvement.
- The **application review** by a team of trained region and area specialists provides a "reality check" that the council's camping program has evident quality and is viable and sustainable.



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- **Camp Strategic Analysis** provides council professional staff and executive boards with an in-depth look at the impact of camps on council operations. All councils will complete the Strategic Analysis Short Form. Based on the results, some councils will complete a comprehensive analysis in which it appears that the camping program may be hindering the council's delivery of the Scouting program.
- The **Authorization to Operate** issued by the region provides clarity, consistency, and accountability in the application of the national camp standards to each camp and sets forth the program quality, facility quality, and financial sustainability commitments the council has made to operate a safe, high-quality, and dynamic program for youth.
- The **Continuous Camp Improvement Program** provides a series of tools that, if used effectively, will help the council continuously improve the safety, quality, and relevance of its camping program by focusing on its customers and meeting their expectations for what a Scouting camp should deliver.
- The **camp assessment**, conducted by the area (for most camps) or a council self-assessment team (for day camps and family camps), provides an annual verification that a camp meets the national camp standards and commitments made in the council's Authorization to Operate and provides valuable feedback to local councils on improving program implementation and program design.
- The **accreditation** or **accreditation with Silver or Gold Recognition**, awarded by the area following the camp assessment, provides concrete recognition that a council's camp is delivering Scouting's promise to youth. It is an important assurance to parents and interested parties of the safety and quality of the council's camping program.
- The **questionnaire** and **reporting program** provide the council, area, region, and BSA nationally objective measures of the council's camping success to assist the council in improving its program and BSA in identifying dynamic and relevant programs that will attract and retain youth in Scouting.

The NCAP is more than a repackaging of the BSA's historic national camp standards. It is a process designed to help councils, with the assistance of the area and region, to develop a safe, high-quality, dynamic, and relevant program that appeals to youth and encourages membership growth and retention. In short, the purpose of the NCAP is to ensure that Scouting's promise is delivered to youth everywhere.

To achieve this purpose, the NCAP operates on two cycles: a multiyear application and Authorization to Operate cycle, in which the council focuses on developing the safest and highest possible quality program while assuring sustainability, and an annual assessment and accreditation cycle, when the council works to continuously improve its program, and the area verifies that the council is implementing its program as planned, provides feedback on strengths and possible improvements, and grants accreditation to deserving programs.

## **The NCAP Multi-Year Authorization Cycle**

The NCAP multi-year authorization cycle starts with the council submitting an application to its BSA region. The application contains a description of all the council's camps for which it is seeking an Authorization to Operate and, ultimately, accreditation. For each camp, the application will describe the program goals, the facilities, how the council will meet the national camp standards, and identify any recommended practices that the council intends to adopt. The application also includes the Camp Facilities Evaluation Tool, an objective assessment of council camp facilities from a brand perspective, and the Strategic Analysis Short Form, an objective assessment of the contribution of the camps, individually and collectively, to the council's financial sustainability. Critically, the application then requires the council to develop program and facilities quality and financial sustainability commitments that the council intends to meet to provide the safest and highest quality program to participants. The application requires approval by the council executive committee or executive board.

The region reviews the application. Based upon the application, the region will determine if the council needs to complete a thorough Camp Strategic Analysis to supplement its application. All councils are encouraged to use the Camp Strategic Analysis Workbook, which includes many valuable tools for understanding camp operations' impact on council operations. The workbook also includes tools for improving programs, facilities, and financial operations.

The Authorization to Operate represents a determination by the National Council, through its region or appropriate national committee, that the council has demonstrated that its camp(s) meet the requirements of the national camp standards. The Authorization to Operate identifies the commitments made by the council concerning the operation of its camp(s). The terms and conditions of the Authorization to Operate are treated in the same fashion as standards. The Authorization to Operate remains valid for a definite term (up to five years) unless the region determines that there is a basis to revoke the Authorization to Operate or to issue an Authorization to Operate for fewer than five years.

In addition, the Authorization to Operate may clarify how a particular standard applies to a camp or may include a variance from a standard. If questions arise on the application of a standard to a camp, the Authorization to Operate should be consulted to determine if it provides resolution. The Authorization to Operate is binding on both the council and the camp assessment team. Effective May 2016, a council must have an Authorization to Operate and must file the Intent to Operate *and* Declaration in Readiness for its camp to be accredited. The Intent to Operate and Declaration of Readiness are discussed below.

## **The NCAP Annual Assessment and Accreditation Cycle**

The NCAP annual assessment and accreditation cycle involves the following elements: postcamp/precamp inspection, Intent to Operate, Declaration of Readiness, developing and implementing the Continuous Camp Improvement Program during camp operation, assessment

and accreditation, and annual reporting. The steps in the typical annual cycle are discussed further below.

The NCAP annual cycle begins with the Intent to Operate, typically completed in the fall of the year before camp. In the Intent to Operate, the council lists the camp properties and camp dates that it intends to operate the next program year. These may include day camps, family camps, resident camps, trek camps, specialty-adventure and high-adventure camps, and COPE and/or climbing courses. The Intent to Operate is used by the area to coordinate local-council self-assessment of day and family camps and area assessment of resident, trek, specialty-adventure and high-adventure camps, and COPE and/or climbing courses.

Postcamp/precamp inspection is the next element in the cycle. This is an opportunity for the council to self-assess the condition of the camp, identify any repairs, and plan a continuing program of improvements to maintain quality and safety.

The Declaration of Readiness is the next element in the annual cycle. It is submitted around May 15, although the area may adjust this date, typically after the postcamp/precamp inspection is completed. In the Declaration of Readiness, the council declares that the camp is ready to open and will offer a program that meets the requirements of the national camp standards and its Authorization to Operate, if issued. Any exceptions are noted. Councils are encouraged to submit as much of the administrative material covered during camp assessment with the Declaration of Readiness to free up time during the assessment for visiting program areas. The camp assessment typically will occur within the first weeks of camp operation. A team led by trained area volunteers will come to the camp and assess its operations. The team will evaluate how well the camp complies with the national camp standards and the camp's Authorization to Operate. Equally important, the assessment team will evaluate how well the program design approved in the Authorization to Operate is actually implemented and will make recommendations to the council on possible improvements. Similarly, the assessment team will make non-mandatory recommendations on possible improvements in program design, all consistent with Scouting's commitment to continuously improving its camping program quality. Finally, the assessment team will issue the camp's accreditation or accreditation with Silver or Gold Recognition, which recognizes program excellence above the camp standards minimum.

If there are issues at the camp, the assessment team will work with the council to address them. A camp that promptly corrects items that are not serious will maintain its accredited status. A camp that cannot correct promptly or that has a history of shortcomings may be conditionally accredited or, in serious cases, may be recommended to the regional camp accreditation committee for possible reopening or revocation of its Authorization to Operate. In cases of possible threat to life or health, the camp assessment team may direct that the program causing such threat be closed until the threat is removed as part of the BSA's commitment to the safety of participants. Area leadership will be notified immediately and give oversight in this situation.

Local councils will conduct a similar self-assessment process at each day camp and family camp and provide the results to the National Council and the area. Each council is encouraged

to appoint a council self-assessment chair to work with the area camp assessment chair to ensure that the council conducts all required assessments of day camps and family camps. Councils are encouraged to conduct similar assessments on other council-organized activities under the direction of their council assessment coordinator with the assistance of the council camping and enterprise risk management committees. These assessments are not reported as part of the NCAP.

At the conclusion of camp, the council will file its annual camping report that provides information on its successes. The National Council will design and provide some specific questions to assist in nationwide efforts to improve BSA camping and build its excitement, dynamism, and relevance for youth.

## Transitioning to the NCAP

In the summer and fall of 2012, 13 councils piloted the new national camp standards. Adjustments were made to reflect their experience. **All councils and camps are subject to the new national camp standards starting in 2013.**

The 13 pilot councils and approximately 35 other councils will submit their applications to the regional camp accreditation committees in early to mid-2013. Approximately 80 councils will follow in late 2013, late 2014, and late 2015, with all Authorizations to Operate issued no later than May 1, 2016, at which time the NCAP implementation will be complete.

Please contact your area camp assessment chair, region camp accreditation chair, or region camp assessment coordinator if you have questions. If additional guidance is needed, please contact the National Council Outdoor Programs Department or email [NCAP@scouting.org](mailto:NCAP@scouting.org), and NCAP personnel will contact you.

For additional information and NCAP resources, visit [www.scouting.org/NCAP](http://www.scouting.org/NCAP).