



# Certified Outdoor Leader Credential Guidelines

The goal of the WEA Certified Outdoor Leader (COL) is to recognize leaders who are proficient in the WEA 6+1 for outdoor knowledge and expertise and equipped to:

- Plan and deliver high-quality wilderness experiences;
- Model responsible minimum impact practices; and
- Exercise good judgment and effective decision-making across a range of program settings.

The COL is a practical, frontline credential, i.e., the Certified Outdoor Leader has received training in and demonstrated competency with the WEA 6+1; and is ready to integrate that training with activity-specific skill development (rock climbing, paddlesports, mountaineering, skiing, etc.).

The COL credential is a certification. Participation in a COL assessment process does not guarantee certification; minimum requirements must be met in order to be eligible for certification. The COL credential does not infer instructor status (i.e., a COL is not qualified to instruct official WEA courses) nor does it imply any level of competency with terrain-specific skills beyond basic backcountry travel. The COL credential can only be provided through an Approved Organizational Member Host (Host) and under the supervision of a Certified Outdoor Educator (COE).

## Requirements for a WEA Certified Outdoor Leader:

### Field Experience:

Documented professional field experience in backcountry leadership/assistant/training. This information is submitted for review in an online portfolio (see below) using the provided Sample Trip/Experience Log or in a format that is clear and easy to read. The log must include at a minimum:

- Dates and Duration of each trip
- Location
- The candidate's role (leader/assistant/training)



WILDERNESS  
EDUCATION  
ASSOCIATION

- Type of Activity(ies)
- Number of participants
- Types of participants (youth, college, adult, special pops, etc.)

Other information may be required by the attending COE.

### Minimum Field Experience Requirements:

A minimum of 21 days if through an Accredited Organizational Member, OR a minimum of 30 days as the lead/assistant/training if not through an AOM.

- **Minimum of 21 days of consecutive overnight backcountry experience on an Accredited Organizational Member-managed course.**
- OR-
- **Minimum of 30 professional field days acting as the backcountry leader or assistant or in training.** NOTE: This can include the required minimum five consecutive day/night assessment course by the Host (see Running a COL Training Program below).
  - No more than 8 single-day experiences (non-overnight). A “single day” is defined as six hours minimum.
  - No more than two days of team-building/group development/challenge course programming may be counted as field days.
  - A COL must have at least one continuous overnight experience of 5 days or more.

NOTE: Personal experiences are useful and worthwhile, but do not count towards the minimum field requirements.

### Field Assessment:

The candidate for the COL must complete a **WEA-specific field experience of five consecutive days (or more)** during which the student is assessed by self, peers, and the COE on the WEA 6+1. This must include student teaching and at least one full day as Leader-Of-the-Day (LOD; solo or partnered). This field time can count toward the required experience total.



## Online Portfolio:

Additionally, the candidate must present an online portfolio (via foliotek.com or other platform) that includes - at a minimum - evidence of:

- Instructor, peer, and self evaluations;
- Professional field experience via a trip/experience log (Wilderness Experience inventory, trip log, etc.); and
- Any other documentation required by the Host (e.g., medical/skill/LNT certifications, etc.).

## Written Exam:

Candidates for the COL must pass the WEA written exam (waived for participants in an Accredited Organizational Member program).

**NOTE: The COL credential is not valid without medical training appropriate for the specific context and setting in which the COL is leading.**

## Running a COL Training Program

The Host must designate a WEA 6+1 training experience (minimum of 5 consecutive field days) which includes student, peer, and instructor evaluations; at least one 24-hour LOD experience for each candidate (solo or partnered); and multiple teaching opportunities. The WEA National Office will provide a sample curriculum and course outline for a basic COL course; however, the COE determines the activity selection, sequence, and structure of the program.

## Administration and Oversight

The COL credential can only be provided through a “Host” under the supervision of a COE. The Host must submit the Organizational Member Credentialing Programs Agreement annually. For each COL field course, the Host must submit the following to the WEA National Office prior to the course start (unless otherwise noted):

- Course dates and description.



- COE's name and contact information.
- A completed COL roster, submitted to the WEA National Office prior to the course or within 30 days of course completion.
- WEA Trip Plan or equivalent documents required by their organization.
- Final signature for approval of certification.

## Assessment

The Certified Outdoor Educator overseeing the candidate will review the online portfolio and determine if the candidate has passed all of the WEA 6+1 performance standards outlined in the COL course assessment. The candidate has six months from completing the WEA-specific assessment course to complete remaining requirements and submit their portfolio to the attending COE for review. Final approval of the COL portfolio rests with the attending COE.

## Cost

There is no WEA-specific fee for participants as they go through a Host's program, although the Host may charge a course fee. Upon submission of all required documentation to the WEA National Office, the candidate must pay the \$100 certification fee (\$50 for participants in an Accredited Organizational Member program).

- ★ **All requirements for cumulative field experience, assessment, and exams must be completed within six months of the designated five-day training course.**



## Awarding the Credential

### WEA National Office

The following items must be received by the WEA National Office in order for the certificate of certification to be issued:

- COE must submit student's COL portfolio;
- Student must have passed the written exam (waived for those in WEA Accredited Programs);
- Student's certification fee must be paid.

## Maintenance

The certification is valid for an initial period of three years. During that time, the COL must maintain their online portfolio (via Foliotek or other online platform) and maintain professional membership with the WEA. Reminder: the COL credential is not valid without medical training appropriate for the specific context and setting in which the COL is leading. Other requirements may apply in order to renew the certification.

---

***Note: Documents such as Organizational Member Host Application, Course Roster, Organizational Member Credentialing Programs Agreement, and Sample Trip Log can be found on the member portion of the WEA website. Required credential minimums, documentation, and course fees are subject to change. Please contact the WEA National Office with any questions at [nationaloffice@weainfo.org](mailto:nationaloffice@weainfo.org).***