

NSS Vertical Training Commission

Trainer Qualification Policies and Procedures

1. Privileges and Expectations

- 1.1. VTC-qualified trainers may conduct skills courses to train cavers in the use of vertical techniques and equipment. All such courses must use, and be limited to, materials and curricula developed by the VTC curriculum committee and approved by the board.
- 1.2. VTC-qualified master trainers may conduct courses to train cavers in the use of vertical techniques, to train cavers to become trainers, and to train trainers to become master trainers. All such courses must be conducted with the prior knowledge and approval of the national coordinator and must use, and be limited to, materials and curricula developed by the curriculum committee and approved by the board.
- 1.3. VTC trainers and master trainers are expected to represent and promote VTC in a positive manner.
- 1.4. VTC trainers and master trainers are expected to adhere to the current VTC [code of conduct](#), anti-harassment policy, non-discrimination policy and code of ethics.
- 1.5. VTC trainers and master trainers may use the VTC logo and VTC-approved curriculum materials in accordance with current VTC policies and procedures.
- 1.6. VTC trainers and master trainers must have access to a valid email address and are expected to submit all course documentation (e.g., registration, reporting) electronically in the manner required by current VTC policies and procedures.

2. General Requirements for Qualification

- 2.1. Be at least 18 years of age.
- 2.2. Maintain current NSS membership throughout the qualification process.
- 2.3. First aid and age appropriate CPR training from a nationally recognized provider is strongly encouraged. First Aid and CPR courses should include hands-on practice and skills demonstration.

3. Process to become a VTC-Qualified Trainer (for Levels 1 and 2 Skills Courses)

- 3.1. Meet the general requirements described in Section 2.
- 3.2. Successfully complete the VTC skills course(s) for the desired trainer qualification level.
[See limited-time exception below under “Charter Trainer Program”.]
- 3.3. Submit a trainer-candidate application to the VTC trainer qualification committee documenting vertical skills and experience, and any previous applicable

vertical-skills training experience. Trainer candidates are expected to already be proficient in all of the vertical skills and knowledgeable on all of the topics included in the Level 1 and/or Level 2 curriculum for at least one ascending system and one descending system.

- 3.4. Within one year following approval of trainer candidate status, successfully complete a VTC trainer course. During this course, the trainer candidate will be expected to demonstrate vertical ropework, rigging, teaching, interpersonal, safety and group management skills, as well as general knowledge of vertical ropework techniques and concepts and of VTC curriculum and procedures. Trainer candidates will be expected to be able to articulate the pros and cons of all descending devices and ascending systems commonly used in caving and covered in VTC curriculum materials, and will be expected to document proficiency in, and seek endorsement to train skills courses using, at least one of these descending devices and at least one of these ascending systems. At the discretion of the trainer qualification committee, accommodations may be made on a case-by-case basis for otherwise qualified trainer candidates whose physical limitations may preclude successful completion of this requirement.
- 3.5. Receive the unanimous approval of all of the master-trainers (at least two) conducting the trainer course that the candidate has successfully completed the trainer course and meets the criteria for qualification as a VTC trainer. Trainer course instructors will conduct an interactive exit evaluation session with the candidate upon course completion.
- 3.6. The lead master trainer for the trainer course will submit documentation and recommendations for all trainer candidates to the VTC trainer qualification committee within two weeks following course completion. The committee will review the submitted documentation and will make any recommendations deemed warranted to the VTC board within two weeks following documentation submission. Unless the VTC board acts to veto trainer qualification by a 2/3 vote of its full current membership within 30 days of receiving any committee recommendations, the trainer qualification committee will provide written notification to the trainer candidate that they are now qualified as a VTC trainer for the specified level. The notification will also specify what type(s) of descending devices and ascending systems they are endorsed to train.
- 3.7. Participation in a trainer course does not guarantee qualification. If one or more master trainers conducting the master-trainer course believe that the candidate has not met all requirements, but may meet them if certain corrective actions are undertaken, they may recommend that the VTC trainer qualification committee give the candidate "continued" status. Trainer candidates may receive trainer status at differing levels of qualification. For example, a candidate may be qualified as a Level 1 trainer, but continued as a Level 2 trainer.

- 3.8. Continued candidates have specific deficiencies that need to be addressed prior to qualification. These may include specific ropework, rigging, modeling, teaching, leadership or organizational skills. Corrective actions may include, but are not limited to: further practice followed by demonstration of proficiency to a master trainer; assisting with a VTC skills course under the mentorship of a master trainer; and/or retaking the trainer course.
- 3.9. Specific deficiencies and suggested corrective actions must be reported, in writing, to the trainer candidate and the VTC trainer qualification committee. This corrective action plan must accompany the trainer-course report.
- 3.10. Any corrective actions must be completed within one year of the trainer-course completion date. The facilitating master trainer must document this completion in writing to the VTC trainer qualification committee within 30 days of the trainer candidate's successful completion of their corrective action plan. When this documentation has been received, the TQC may approve the candidate as a trainer by majority vote.

4. Process to become a VTC Qualified Master Trainer

- 4.1. Meet the general requirements described in Section 2.
- 4.2. Be a qualified VTC trainer for at least two years.
- 4.3. Have taught and properly reported at least two VTC Level 1 or Level 2 skills courses, including at least one as lead trainer, during the past four years.
- 4.4. Submit application documenting advanced vertical-caving and vertical-training knowledge, skills, experience, and proficiency. Expectations of master-trainer candidates are significantly higher than those for trainer candidates, particularly with respect to teaching skills and experience.
- 4.5. Within one year following approval of master-trainer candidate status, successfully complete a VTC master-trainer course. During this course, the master-trainer candidate will be expected to demonstrate teaching, interpersonal, safety and group management skills, as well as general knowledge of vertical ropework techniques and concepts and of VTC curriculum and procedures, at levels significantly above those expected of trainer candidates. They will also be responsible for demonstrating the ability to provide feedback on these skills as demonstrated by others, along with recommending corrective action. At the discretion of the trainer qualification committee, accommodations may be made on a case-by-case basis for otherwise qualified master trainer candidates whose physical limitations may preclude successful completion of this requirement.

- 4.6. Upon successful completion of the master-trainer course, the master-trainer candidate must receive the unanimous approval of all of the master trainers (at least two) conducting the master-trainer course that the candidate has met the criteria for qualification. Master-trainer course instructors will conduct an interactive exit evaluation session with the candidate upon course completion.
- 4.7. The lead master trainer for the master-trainer course will submit documentation and recommendations for all master-trainer candidates to the VTC trainer qualification committee within two weeks following course completion. The committee will review the submitted documentation and make its recommendations to the VTC board within two weeks following document submission. Upon the majority vote of the full current membership of the VTC board confirming that the individual has met the criteria for qualification and is also suitable to be a master trainer, the VTC trainer qualification committee chair will notify the candidate that they are now qualified to teach as a master trainer.
- 4.8. Participation in a master-trainer course does not guarantee qualification. If one or more of the master trainers conducting the master-trainer course believe that the candidate has not met all requirements, but may meet them if certain corrective actions are undertaken, they may recommend that the VTC trainer qualification committee give the candidate “continued” status.
 - 4.8.1. Continued candidates have specific deficiencies that need to be addressed prior to qualification. At the master-trainer level, these will most likely include specific teaching, leadership or organizational skills or knowledge, but they could also entail issues with ropework, rigging, and/or modeling skills or knowledge. Corrective actions may include, but are not limited to: assisting with one or more VTC skills and/or trainer courses under the mentorship of a master trainer; retaking the master-trainer course; or further practice followed by demonstration of proficiency to a master trainer.
 - 4.8.2. Specific deficiencies and suggested corrective actions must be reported, in writing, to the master-trainer candidate and the VTC trainer qualification committee. This corrective action plan must accompany the master-trainer course report.
 - 4.8.3. Any corrective actions must be completed within two years of the master-trainer course completion date. The facilitating master trainer must document this completion in writing to the VTC trainer qualification committee within 30 days of the master-trainer candidate’s successful completion of their corrective action plan. When this documentation has been received, the regular review and approval process described above will resume.

5. Terms of Qualification

- 5.1. An initial trainer or master-trainer qualification is valid for three years following the last day of the month of completion of their trainer or master-trainer course.
- 5.2. Trainers and master-trainers must maintain current NSS membership to maintain their qualification. Individuals for whom NSS membership has expired may not teach or issue certificates of completion for VTC training courses. Master trainers will also be expected to maintain current trainer qualification.

6. Requalification

- 6.1. Trainers and master-trainers must renew their qualification prior to expiration. Any requalification completed during the last six months of a current qualification will be valid for three years from the date of the current qualification expiration. A requalification completed outside of this period is valid for three years following the last day of the month in which they were requalified.
- 6.2. Trainers and master trainers must have taught and properly reported at least one course at their highest level of qualification during their current period of qualification.
- 6.3. The requalification process may include, but is not limited to, successful completion of a trainer or master-trainer update course and written and practical examinations developed by the VTC curriculum committee and reviewed and approved by the VTC trainer qualification committee and VTC board, to demonstrate that they remain current in their vertical-training knowledge, skills, and proficiency and in their familiarity with current VTC training curricula.
- 6.4. Trainers and master trainers who do not successfully complete the requalification process prior to expiration may be required by the VTC board to retake the corresponding qualification course or otherwise demonstrate to the satisfaction of the trainer qualification committee that they meet current qualification requirements.
- 6.5. Upon written request prior to expiration of qualification, the VTC trainer qualification committee may grant one-year extensions of the qualification term and/or requalification timeframe. The request must document the circumstances under which the extension should be considered. Examples of circumstances that may warrant extensions may include, but are not limited to: prolonged health issues or extended overseas military or other work deployment. Extensions for periods longer than one year may be considered on a case by case basis. Such

extensions, if granted, may include a mandatory re-evaluation prior to reinstatement.

7. Removal

- 7.1. As outlined in the VTC Charter, trainers and master trainers serve at the pleasure of the NSS Administrative Vice President (AVP) and at the pleasure of the VTC board, and may be removed either by the AVP or a two-thirds vote of the full current membership of the board, with or without cause.

8. Initial Provisions for Qualification of Trainers and Master Trainers

- 8.1. The VTC board may approve individuals who have participated in the initial course piloting process to serve as an initial group of master trainers and trainers. Because the final course curricula may change based on these pilot courses, the initial terms for these individuals will be one year following the last day of the month in which they were initially qualified.
- 8.2. Charter Trainer Program. VTC strongly encourages all prospective master-trainer and trainer candidates to become familiar with the VTC curriculum by taking the skills-training course(s) for which they seek trainer qualification before applying to become a trainer. However, individuals with strong prior vertical-training experience who apply prior to December 31, 2025 may apply to become a VTC trainer or master trainer without first taking the corresponding vertical-skills training course. To be approved for this charter trainer program, an applicant must:
 - 8.2.1. Meet the general requirements for trainers.
 - 8.2.2. Document in their written application that they have significant vertical-training experience and skills, including providing contact information for former students and/or fellow instructors willing to serve as references.
 - 8.2.3. Successfully complete a written examination that will assess their familiarity with the VTC curriculum for the corresponding level.
 - 8.2.4. Demonstrate, at a level of proficiency appropriate for modeling to students, all practical skills that are included in the VTC curriculum for the corresponding level. At the discretion of the trainer qualification committee, accommodations may be made on a case-by-case basis for otherwise qualified trainer candidates whose physical limitations may preclude successful completion of this requirement.

- 8.3. The VTC trainer qualification committee may, on a case by case basis, waive or modify the two-year trainer experience and/or skills-course teaching requirements for master-trainer candidates who apply prior to December 31, 2024.