

Essential Eligibility Criteria

Making ATC Programs Inclusive

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC)'s mission is to preserve and manage the Appalachian Trail (A.T.)—ensuring that its vast natural beauty and priceless cultural heritage can be shared and enjoyed today, tomorrow, and for centuries to come. ATC values diversity and aspires to attract qualified individuals from all backgrounds and of varying abilities to participate in their programs and activities. Through ensuring an inclusive environment ATC can create a safe working or recreational atmosphere in which all people feel valued and respected and have access to the same opportunities.

Inclusivity is defined as an intention or policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized.

Challenges inherent to the A.T.

If you wish to join us in a program **on** the A.T., consider that: The A.T. varies in width from 18"-48". There are obstructions on the Trail including 12" steps, water bars, rocks up to 24" high, roots up to 6" high and narrow (24" or less wide) log bridges to name a few. The A.T. trail corridor and tread are highly variable with hiking surfaces ranging from little to no grade on firm obstacle free soil to steep, slick, scrambling climbs down and over boulders the size of compact cars. Negotiating deadfalls should be anticipated, as are stream crossings with 24" wide log bridges, or no bridges at all!

Depending on the season, there may be standing water, muddy areas, slick leaves, deadfalls, snow and ice, etc. Footing can be uncertain at times. The Trail is also sometimes built into the side of the mountain with steep drop offs on one side of the Trail that could be as much as a 100'. It is important to recognize that the environment of most of these hikes or programs are in outdoor settings. The natural environment is dynamic and often presents physical and mental challenges to even the most experienced hiker.

Working or recreating in the conditions described above on ATC programs can trigger emotional stressors of being in the woods and in a different environment if you're not used to it. This could cause an instance of vertigo in some individuals, shortness of breath, and even a panic attack. Breathing issues can be a result of walking with a weighted backpack in changing elevation if not accustomed to it. Stress can also be induced by participating with a group of strangers for multiple days at a time, along with being dirty and smelly, without access to showers, a sense of feeling isolated, and a disconnect from technology and reliable phone service.



ATC is guided by a set of core values that represent the organization's commitment to preserve and manage the A.T. Our goal is to provide you with the best experience with safety in mind. To minimize risk to individuals participating in ATC-led activities, each person must take personal responsibility for himself or herself, must act within his or her own limits and abilities, and must play a part in the overall health and well-being of fellow participants and to the group. That said, your leaders and instructors will help you to meet any challenges head-on with the resources and support you need to have a safe and successful trip into the backcountry.

While ATC does not specialize in serving persons with disabilities, we often accommodate persons of 'varying abilities' and are able to include people of different ages, gender, skill levels, and outdoor experience, making the necessary program and activity modifications to ensure a safe, successful, and enjoyable experience for everyone. Therefore, ATC encourages people of ALL abilities to consider participating in ATC programs.

Essential Eligibility Criteria (EEC)

The ATC's EEC is a list of specific physical and cognitive expectations ATC has for a person who is considering participating on an ATC-sponsored program. The ATC has developed various sets of EEC which enable program staff to enhance inclusive in each of their program areas. ***This list of requirements is not intended to exclude one's participation.*** Rather it's to inform people of what to expect, empower themselves to ask if they can do what the program requires, thus enabling them to participate in the program successfully and safely. If needed to enhance one's participation and inclusion, [Reasonable Accommodations](#) will be considered.

ATC offers several programs including but not limited to trail maintenance crews, boundary monitoring, and guided hikes. The individual EEC criteria can vary greatly. ATC *must* meet the guidelines of the [National Park Service's Management Policies 2006](#). If you have a question or concern about your ability to meet any criteria, please speak with the program lead to determine if reasonable accommodations can be made. If you have questions about the ATC's EEC, or have concerns about how the EEC is being implemented, please contact info@appalachiantrail.org.

Below are terms and definitions to help aide a person's decision making regarding his/her ability to meet EEC.

Reasonable Accommodation

is the assistance and/or modifications made to a program, task, equipment, or program setting that will enable an individual to participate in ATC sponsored programs and activities to the full extent of their abilities.

Individual needs can vary. Reasonable Accommodations can be made that address a range of religious, physical, mental or emotional considerations.

Please note that many of us already make individual accommodations to enhance our outdoor experience including, but not limited to: use of hiking poles, wearing specialized clothing (boots, broad-brimmed hats, and Permethrin embedded outerwear), ultra-lite gear, eyewear, hearing aids. Oftentimes, similar, yet slightly different modifications can be made to assist the participant who may require them. You should discuss what EEC and reasonable accommodations are needed – if any – with a staff member or trip leader in advance of program delivery.

National Park Service's Management Policies 2006, The Guide to Managing the National Park System

8.2.4 Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities

All reasonable efforts will be undertaken to make NPS facilities, programs, and services accessible to and usable by all people, including those with disabilities. This policy reflects the commitment to provide access to the widest cross section of the public, and to ensure compliance with the intent of the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The Service will also comply with section 507 of the Americans with Disabilities Act (42 USC 12207), which relates specifically to the operation and management of federal wilderness areas. Specific guidance for implementing these laws is found in the Secretary of the Interior's regulations regarding enforcement of nondiscrimination on the basis of disability in Department of the Interior programs (43 CFR Part 17, Subpart E), and General Service Administration regulations adopting accessibility standards for the Architectural Barriers Act (41 CFR Part 102-76, Subpart C).

One primary tenet of accessibility is that, to the highest degree reasonable, people with disabilities should be able to participate in the same programs and activities available to everyone else. In choosing among methods for providing accessibility, higher priority will be given to those methods that offer programs and activities in the most integrated setting appropriate. Special, separate, or alternative facilities, programs, or services will be provided only when existing ones cannot reasonably be made accessible. The determination of what is reasonable will be made only after careful consultation with persons with disabilities or their representatives. Any decision that would result in less than equal opportunity is subject to the filing of an official disability rights complaint under the departmental regulations cited above.

Examples of Reasonable Accommodations

ATC has broken up Reasonable Accommodations into five categories as seen below. Examples are given for each category, but other types of accommodations may be possible.

Program

Change group dynamics that cater to an individuals' needs

Provide digital access to workshop presentation prior to delivery

Modify the trip itinerary, by choosing a route with easier terrain

Hike less mileage per day.

Task

reduce pack carrying weight

team-up participants for camp chores

allow for frequent rest breaks

identify tasks commensurate with assessed functional skills

Fitness regimen (Crew Fit, Backpack Fit) distributed in advance to prepare participants for the physicality of what the program requires.

Equipment

Anything you bring in the field needs to be able to be fixed in the field.

Knee/ankle braces

No-slip grips on hand tools.

Use of personal assistive technology

Hearing Aids

Trekking Poles

Sleep Aids

Setting

Set up camp on flat sites

Ensure accessible facilities at workshop locations

Provide trail improvement opportunities closer to trailheads to limit travel

Trained Aids

Trained Aids MUST meet the physical and cognitive requirements as outlined in the EEC.

Sign Language Interpreter and Sighted Guide

Interpreter

Service animals

Does the service animal meet the physical and cognitive requirements?

What is the function of the service animal?

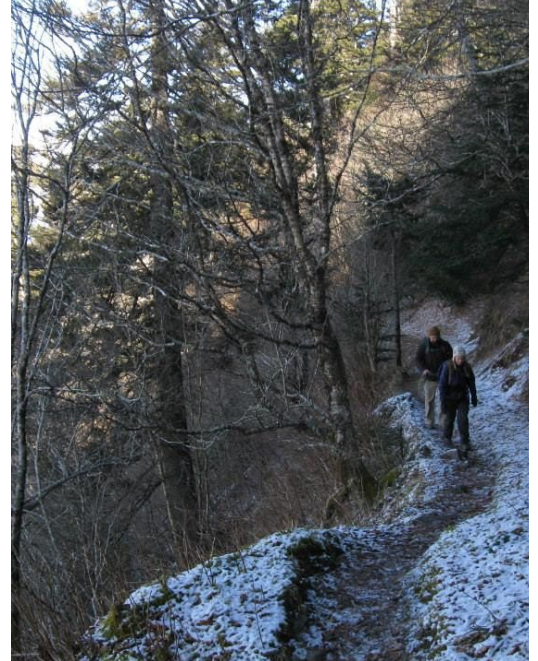
GENERAL ESSENTIAL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR ALL ATC PROGRAMS

All participants must be able to complete the following requirements **without assistance** from a Reasonable Accommodation:

- A. Effectively warn others of potential or impending hazards.
- B. Complete the preceding warning and notifications up to a distance of 50 meters and in conditions with limited visibility and audibly, such as darkness, inclement weather, loud background noise due to high winds, or fast-moving water, or terrain where a line of sight to other group members or leaders is not available.
- C. Remain alert and focused for several hours at a time while traveling through wilderness
- D. Travel during periods of inclement weather including but not limited to: rain, sleet, snow, fog, high winds, and thunder.

All participants must be able to complete the following requirements **with or without assistance** from a Reasonable Accommodation.

- A. Must understand English while perceiving, understanding and following instructions
- B. Can effectively notify leaders or other participants of personal distress, injury, illness or the need for assistance.
- C. Perform necessary self-care, including maintaining adequate nutrition and hydration, dressing appropriately for environmental conditions, maintaining personal hygiene, and managing known medical conditions.
- D. Work cooperatively as a member of a group and support a team effort, despite potentially challenging circumstances. This may require flexibility and the ability to compromise on a personal or group level.
- E. Perceive, understand and follow detailed instructions on wilderness travel, risk management, personal care, hazard avoidance, and other topics.
- F. Recognize and react appropriately to significant and apparent hazards, including ones previously identified by leaders or other participants
- G. Learn and perform necessary non-verbal communication systems for a given activity, such as hand signals, rope tugs, body movements, etc.
- H. Perform necessary self-care in a remote and outdoor environment, including maintain adequate nutrition and hydration, dressing appropriately for environmental conditions, maintaining personal hygiene, and managing personal (and, in some cases, group) safety gear
- I. Work cooperatively as a member of a group and support a team effort, despite potentially challenging circumstances. This may require flexibility and the ability to compromise on an interpersonal or group level.
- J. Act in a manner consistent with Leave No Trace ethics. Participants do not need to know Leave No Trace ethics prior to participating in an ATC activity, however all participants must be able to follow leaders' directions regarding minimum impact guidelines. For more information, go to www.lnt.org.
- K. Manage any known medical conditions in a remote environment for as long as two times the scheduled length of the trip.
- L. Only use personal equipment and assistive technology that can be easily repaired in the field. Determine if you can be safe and secure if the equipment is broken or unusable as intended.



ESSENTIAL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR HIKING

In addition to the EEC for General ATC-sponsored activities listed in, all participants on trips that include hiking must be able to complete the following requirements **without assistance** from an accommodation:

- A. Travel over uneven, variable terrain, including but not limited to: flat, uphill, and downhill, varying trail width from 18"-48", obstructions of the Trail including rocks, roots, 6" steps, water bars, slippery log bridges and steps, potential fording of small streams, negotiating muddy areas and standing water.
- B. If conditions become adverse such as steep grade level, repeated 6" steps, or negotiating dense muddy areas or standing water, participants can still travel without stopping for breaks for twenty minutes.



In addition to the EEC for all ATC-sponsored activities listed in sections 1 & 2, all participants on trips that include hiking must be able to complete the following requirements **with or without assistance** from an accommodation:

- A. Carry personal and group gear required for the specific activity in a backpack
Carry the minimum pack weight of 25% of one's body weight for the intended duration of the activity.

ESSENTIAL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR HIKING WITH A CAMPING COMPONENT

In addition to the EEC for all ATC-sponsored activities listed in sections 1 & 2, all participants on trips that include hiking must be able to complete the following requirements **with or without assistance** from an accommodation:

- A. Learn and safely perform the fundamental camping skills of finding a campsite, setting up a shelter, and cooking with a camp stove.
- B. Travel about the campsite in order to participate in instructional moments, attend to toileting needs while properly disposing of waste, and contribute to individual and group related tasks as necessary.

