

Recommended Guidelines for Municipalities Writing/Reviewing Surf School Proposals
The National Surf Schools and Instructors Association
October 9, 2013

Introduction

While many beach cities do not control surf instruction within their boundaries, more often the proliferation of surf schools has led to some legislation by municipalities to control the quality of instruction provided to student tourists who wish to learn to surf while on vacation.

Unfortunately, those who issue or review Requests for Proposals (RFP's) have no background on the commonly accepted standards recognized by the world's three primary surf instructor certifying bodies. This paper identifies the basic common body of knowledge criteria that should be considered when writing or evaluating competing proposals.

Often Misunderstood Criteria

The simple fact that a particular school (or instructor) has been giving lessons in an area for an extended period of time does not by default mean that the individual follows internationally recommended standards for quality instruction. A great many individuals use the fact that they have years of experience as a justification for not identifying or following newly emerging techniques for improved instruction. This would be equivalent to a medical doctor who does not keep up with modern techniques of treatment. The surf school industry is no different than other industries. Surf instruction has evolved in recent years with most schools around the world accepting the fact that new techniques of instruction are now available.

Instructor Certifications

Standards now exist and have been recognized internationally. Some organizations, like the NSSIA, have used the International Standards Organization (ISO) Standard 17024, General Requirements for Bodies Operating Certification Systems of Persons, dated 2003, as the basis for developing minimum standards for accrediting instructors. The International Surfers Association is another body that has developed standards. Individuals that have completed the training and other criteria are considered the top instructors in the industry.

Basic Criteria

Below are listed basic criteria from the Common Body of Knowledge that all instructors should know and follow for safe and effective surf instruction.

1. Surf History

Minimum Criteria – Surfing Roots, Surf Culture (Aloha Spirit - Give Respect/Get Respect), Board Evolution, modern designs and what they do

2. Teaching Theory/Lesson Techniques

Minimum Criteria – Adult and Adolescent learning theory including stages of learning, group dynamics and instruction techniques, name learning, soft and hard skills, psychosocial

development in adolescence, adult teaching/learning techniques, auditory/visual/kinesthetic techniques

3. Etiquette/Board Handling Safety

Minimum Criteria - Causes of “surf rage” and how to avoid issues during lessons, Law of the Surf criteria (14 points to consider), #1 criterion for safety and common sense, Surfers Code of Ethics (5 points to teach including right of way), low impact operation.

4. Injuries and Injury Control

Minimum Criteria - Common surf injury types, first aid for common problems, RICER, sunburn cautions, Surfer’s Myelopathy, signs and symptoms of drowning, stroke, MRSA, surf school equipment protection, treating blood exposure and related laws for employees and students, medical/insurance reports.

5. Dangers in the Water and Treatments

Minimum Criteria - Coral cuts, sea urchins, jelly fish stings, stingray stings, shark cautions, sand bacteria

6. Business and Applicable Laws

Minimum Criteria - Licensing and licensing issues, due diligence, business planning, risk analysis and risk reduction, insurance needs, sexual harassment, waivers, non-impact advertising and marketing,

7. Surf Conditioning

Minimum Criteria - Warm-ups, the Regulatory Flexibility Act, health and safety standards. Employee training (OSHA)

Some Additional Business Guidelines

It’s simple logic that school owners have and understanding that risk and regulation are intertwined when you offer training in any physical activity. Those who teach surfing must understand the possible consequences of whatever they do for their students. Not only can they be held liable for their activities in the water, but recent court cases have shown that if training doesn’t cover safety issues, the instructor can still be held accountable when the student has moved on to learning on their own.

To stay in business and prevent damaging legal entanglements, school owners must understand their legal obligations and make good business decision. There are professional organizations that can provide this needed information. Instructor certification and school accreditations are the new standard by which all schools should be evaluated. The best advice we can offer for a beach city trying to address safety issues for their visitors as well as surf instructor uniformity is to consider the certification process in their legislative actions.