

2021

Guide to the Independent AJ



Interested in managing your own Independent Adventurous Journey? Well, you're in the right place! This document provides vital information for a successful Adventurous Journey (AJ), including the basic requirements, ways you can adapt the requirements through December 2022 to ensure COVID-19 safety, and resources to aid in the planning and execution of your trip.

Award USA maintains high standards for the successful facilitation of an Adventurous Journey, just as we do for the other sections of the Award. We expect you to ensure that all of the conditions of the Adventurous Journey are met, using the ethos of this Award section as a compass. Your Award Leader can help guide you through this process. Be sure to read this guide in full and check out the many resources that are linked here! We look forward to receiving your application to complete an Independent AJ.

Steps to complete an Independent Adventurous Journey

1. Review Chapter 6 of the [Participant Handbook](#) to learn about the different sections of the Adventurous Journey, steps to complete it, and the requirements.

NOTE: The handbook describes the AJ requirements under typical circumstances. Many of these details still apply, such as the role of the AJ Supervisor and Assessor, how to decide on an aim, required hours of purposeful effort, etc. This document provides supplementary information on the 15 Conditions of the AJ can be adapted to the restrictions in place in your community due to COVID-19 to still do an outdoor AJ. If you are interested in [the Bronze](#) or [Silver](#) Virtual Explorations, read through the linked documents on how to pursue those options and follow the instructions there rather than what is below for outdoor independent journeys. Virtual trips do not require the applications listed below. They have a different process.

2. Participants complete the [online application for the Independent AJ](#). Only one application is required per Award team. Not all team members need to be Award USA participants. However, if they would like to enroll in the program and count this AJ towards their own Award, they may request registration information [here](#). Applications are due at least 4 weeks before the journey is set to take place.
3. AJ Supervisors, AJ Assessors, and parents/guardians of participants under age 18 also complete the [online application for the Independent AJ](#) to provide consent and agree to Award USA's Safeguarding Policy and Volunteer Code of Conduct. One form required per adult and it must be submitted at least 2 weeks before the journey is set to take place.
4. Upon approval of your application from your Award Leader/Award USA, enter information about your AJ in the Online Record Book. You will add information to the three AJ sections: Preparation and Training, Practice Journey, and Qualifying Journey.
5. Once you have completed your Adventurous Journey, complete the required report within four weeks. Instructions can be found at the end of this document. The report product must be uploaded into the ORB in order for your Award Leader to approve the section. You may also upload photos or any other evidence from the journey that you would like to share.

COVID-19 Adaptations and Examples

Changes to Award Requirements at all Levels

- AJs may be organized in a familiar environment, such as one's own neighborhood or a frequently visited park.
- Participants can use a home, school gym, backyard, etc. as accommodation during the AJ. Further, a group's accommodation can be physically separated, e.g. participants all sleep in their separate homes or separate tents.

Changes to Award Requirements Specific to Each Level

	Bronze	Silver	Gold
Preparation & Training	Required as usual with oversight from Supervisor, with the option to use virtual training resources.	Required as usual with oversight from Supervisor, with the option to use virtual training resources.	Required as usual with oversight from Supervisor, with the option to use virtual training resources.
Practice Journey	<p>1 day/1 night with team present and Supervisor checking in. Can be completed in tandem with Qualifying Journey.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Can be waived if AJ Supervisor believes participant(s) will be safe and successful without it.</p>	1 day/1 night with team present and Supervisor checking in. Can be completed in tandem with Qualifying Journey.	1 day/1 night with team present and Supervisor checking in. Can be completed in tandem with Qualifying Journey.
Qualifying Journey	2 days/1 night with team present and Supervisor and Assessor checking in.	3 days/2 nights with team present and Supervisor and Assessor checking in.	<p>4 days/3 nights with team present and Supervisor and Assessor checking in.</p> <p>*This may be split up over two weekends.</p>

Virtual Option	<u>Virtual Bronze AJ</u> available to cover all three sections of the AJ at this level.	<u>Virtual Silver AJ</u> available to cover all three sections of the AJ at this level.	The Gold AJ must be completed in person and outdoors. Any of the adaptations to provide for social distancing and safety may be utilized.
Postponement Option	Participants may complete all sections of the Award aside from the AJ, register and begin the Silver level, and count the Silver Practice Journey for their Bronze Qualifying Journey to retroactively complete that level.	Participants may complete all sections of the Award aside from the AJ, register and begin the Gold level, and count the Silver Practice Journey for their Bronze Qualifying Journey to retroactively complete that level.	The Gold AJ must be completed to finish this level of the Award. An age extension has been put in place, so participants nearing age 25 may request to complete their Award past that age.
Report Submission Requirements	Regular report required for self-planned journeys. OR Submit required documents associated with virtual journey.	Regular report required for self-planned journeys. OR Submit required documents associated with virtual journey.	Regular report required for self-planned journeys.

AJ Examples During COVID-19

[Here you can review different examples of Adventurous Journeys](#) that have been completed this past year using the permitted temporary changes to the Award requirements. These examples should not be seen as an exhaustive list, but rather inspiration for your own trip! If you have an idea for a creative AJ that you don't see here, talk to your Award Leader! Award USA can support you in adapting your idea to meet the AJ requirements.

Planning Resources

- [AJ Training and Preparation Overview](#)
- The National Park Service has a variety of informative articles about [trails and hiking](#), [biking](#), [camping](#), [watching wildlife](#), and [health and safety](#).
- REI provides [great guidance](#) to backpacking beginners and has [videos](#) featuring a wide variety of instructive material.
- Our friends at Outward Bound have also shared this [Beginners Guide to the Backcountry](#).
- [AJ Training Resources from Lupine Adventure Co-op](#)
- [AJ Training Resources from The North Face](#)
- [First Aid Course Materials from St. John's Ambulance](#)
- [New Zealand Mountain Safety Council "Get Outdoors!" series](#)
- [Norms and Expectations of Humans in the Wilderness](#)
- [Example AJ Gear List](#)
- [Participant Route Card Template and Example](#)
- [Participant Activity Plan Template and Example](#)
- [AJ Aims](#)
- [Supervisor Plan Template and Example](#)
- [Assessor Route Card Template](#)
- [Assessor Debriefing Questions](#)
- [Assessor Report- Hard Copy Version](#) (Assessors can submit this information electronically via the Online Record Book. They will receive a link from ORB@onlinerecordbook.org.)
- [AJ FAQ](#)

Adventurous Journey Report Instructions

Participants must complete individual Journey Reports to be submitted to Award USA prior to approval of their Award. It is due four weeks after the completion of the Qualifying Journey. The Report should be 2-3 written pages at the Bronze Level; 3-4 pages at the Silver Level; and 4-5 pages at the Gold Level, or the equivalent in another format. You have the option to submit your report as a video, audio recording, narrative journal, or other creative format as long as you provide the information below. It must include the following information:

- *Preparation and Planning:* How did you prepare and plan for your Adventurous Journey? What topics specifically did you seek additional training to learn more about? How did you recruit your teammates, Supervisor, and Assessor? What was your confidence level after the preparation and planning process? What do you wish you had done differently?
- *Practice Journey:* Provide an itinerary/day-to-day account of your Practice Journey. What did you learn from this experience? What did you enjoy? How were you challenged by it and what adjustments did you make prior to the Qualifying Journey?
- *Qualifying Journey:* Provide an itinerary/day-to-day account of your Qualifying Journey. Be sure to describe how you spent your required hours of purposeful effort journeying and working towards your aim (see page 17 of the Participant Handbook). Were you able to achieve your aim? What did you learn? What was the highlight of the trip? Would you have done anything differently? How have you grown personally from your Adventurous Journey experience?