



PanAm Aquatics Club Certification Program

Program Guide

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Certification Program Overview	2
Aims & Goals of the Certification Program	2
Rules & Guidelines: The Importance of Adhering to the Program	2
Modules Overview	3
Program Structure	4
Certification Structure Overview	4
PanAm Aquatics Module Mastery & Impact Badge	4
• Level 1: Education & Evaluation	5
• Level 2: Basic Implementation	5
• Level 3: Intermediate Implementation	5
• Level 4: Advanced Implementation	5
• Level 5: Excellence in Implementation	6
PanAm Aquatics Certified Club Badge	6
PanAm Aquatics Club Excellence Recognition	6
Bronze Certified PAQ Institution: Foundations of Excellence	7
Silver Certified PAQ Institution: Advanced Excellence	7
Gold Certified PAQ Institution: Excellence in Leadership and Transformational Impact	7
Excellence Recognition Criteria	7
Rewards & Incentives	11
Conclusion	11

Certification Program Overview

The **PanAm Aquatics Club Certification Program** is a comprehensive and interactive initiative designed to equip clubs across the Americas with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to build stronger, more efficient, and sustainable high-performing aquatic environments. This certification program emphasizes growth and development in safe sport, coach development, athlete well-being, event coordination, project management, and operational best practices with all members of the aquatic community. By completing the certification program, clubs in the Americas will ensure they are operating at the highest standard, enhancing the experience for athletes, coaches, parents, volunteers, and all stakeholders in the aquatic sports community.

The program is also a key tool for uniting the continent's aquatics teams and clubs, fostering collaboration, and establishing a unified approach to progress throughout our collaborative and interactive sessions. It aims to transform the way aquatic clubs operate and engage with the broader aquatic sports ecosystem, propelling the region to the next level of excellence.

Aims & Goals of the Certification Program

1. **Capacity Building:** Equip clubs with the knowledge and tools needed to provide world-class support to athletes, coaches, parents, and volunteers.
 2. **Strengthen High-Performing Environments:** Promote elite and safe environments for athletes to thrive in.
 3. **Foster Collaboration:** Encourage cross-discipline collaboration and the sharing of best practices to elevate aquatics across the continent.
 4. **Implement Best Practices:** Ensure the practical application of learned materials in real-world scenarios, leading to measurable improvements in club operations.
 5. **Advancement of Aquatic Sports:** Provide a pathway for the sustainable growth of aquatic sports at all levels—from grassroots to elite and masters athletes.
 6. **Promote Athlete Wellness:** Focus on holistic support for athletes, including mental health, physical wellness, and protection through safe sport initiatives.
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Rules & Guidelines: The Importance of Adhering to the Program

1. **Active Participation:** All clubs must actively engage in the certification program, with attendance, participation, and performance tracking at every stage. Full involvement from club leadership is required and coaching staff participation is encouraged to demonstrate commitment to the initiative.
2. **Integrity Code:** Adherence to the PanAm Aquatics Integrity Code is mandatory. Clubs and their representatives must demonstrate professionalism, ethical conduct, and a willingness to collaborate and share knowledge. Any breach of integrity will be investigated, and non-compliance could result in the suspension of certification status.
3. **Ongoing Progress Tracking:** Clubs will be assessed regularly through the submission of evaluations, proposals, and reports.

4. **Clear Documentation:** Clubs must document their progress and demonstrate how they have implemented key learning points into their operations and programs.
 5. **Completion of Requirements:** Clubs are expected to complete all modules and reach the necessary levels of achievement to receive certification. All evaluations, tests, and implementation stages must be successfully passed to advance to the next stage and become certified.
 6. **Commitment to Continuous Improvement:** In addition to meeting the minimum education, assessment, and implementation requirements, clubs must commit to continuous improvement. This means consistently evaluating the effectiveness of the changes made, gathering feedback from stakeholders, and adjusting strategies where necessary as well as innovating to bolster multidimensional impact. Clubs must demonstrate an ongoing commitment to refining and enhancing their operations and initiatives based on both the learning from the certification program and external feedback.
 7. **Validity & Retrievals:** All badges granted are subject to an annual renewal process, which includes topic refreshers and development opportunities provided by PanAm Aquatics, along with performance reports to ensure continued adherence to the program's high standards. PanAm Aquatics reserves the right to revoke or invalidate any badge at any time if the PanAm Aquatics Integrity Code is violated by a club, its leadership, or coaching staff, if there is evidence of tampering with assessments or progress reports, or for any other action that undermines the integrity and application of the certification program.
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Modules Overview

The program will be divided into **6 specific modules** that correspond to key areas necessary for the growth of clubs. These modules include:

1. **Discover Aquatics in the Americas**
 - PAQ Vision, Mission and Values
 - Overview of Disciplines
 - Challenges Facing Aquatics
 - Importance of Supporting Members' Development
2. **Safe Sport**
 - Legal and ethical frameworks for athlete protection
 - Safeguarding measures for athletes, coaches, staff, parents, and other members or partners
 - Developing high-performing environments
3. **Project and Event Management**
 - Project planning and management
 - Event development and budgeting
 - Risk management in events
 - Communication and marketing for events
4. **Athlete Wellness**
 - Mental health
 - Physical health and injury prevention
 - Building a culture of athlete well-being
 - Bolstering athlete committees & initiatives

5. Coach Development

- Certification and professional development standards
- Creating effective programs & strategically guiding athletes
- Planning & management best practices
- Support systems and initiatives

6. Parent and Volunteer Development

- Building an inclusive and committed team culture
 - Alignment with Club Goals and Values
 - Developing positive parent engagement and support
 - Volunteer Engagement and Management
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Program Structure

The program is divided into **three main stages** for each module, which are required to get individual certifications:

1. Stage 1: Education (Learning)

This stage focuses on providing the knowledge and resources needed to understand the critical aspects of running a successful aquatics club.

2. Stage 2: Evaluation (Comprehension and Testing)

After the education stage, clubs will be assessed through tests and initiative proposals to ensure comprehension, proper management, and vision for change of the topics learned.

3. Stage 3: Implementation (Applying Knowledge to Practice)

This final stage focuses on taking the knowledge and skills gained from the educational and evaluation stages, as well as implementing feedback from initiative proposals, and using them to implement concrete initiatives, projects, and improvements within each club. Stage 3 will be successfully completed upon fulfilling the minimum implementation requirements, demonstrating the practical application of the knowledge acquired during the program.

Certification Structure Overview

To recognize the progress and completion of the PanAmAquatics Club Certification Program, we have developed a **three-tiered badge system** that will be awarded to clubs that meet the criteria. The first tier recognizes the completion as well as the level of implementation of individual modules with **five levels of achievement** based on the quality and impact of such emerging initiatives, while the second tier rewards the clubs for completing the entire program with a prestigious **PanAm Aquatics Certified Club Badge**.

PanAm Aquatics Module Mastery & Impact Badge

The **PanAm Aquatics Module Mastery & Impact Badge** will be awarded to Clubs upon successful completion of an individual module, including the education, assessment, and minimum implementation requirements. However, each individual module badge is tiered into **five levels** based on the quality and impact of such implementation.

These levels represent how well the Club has not only absorbed the content but also effectively applied it within their organization. Each level reflects the depth of integration, the strategic approach taken, and the outcomes generated from the implementation of the module's material. The institution will automatically receive the Level 1 badge after successfully completing each module and can submit an application for a level upgrade as their efforts evolve to obtain the next level of certification. The possible levels of certification are the following:

- **Level 1: Education & Evaluation**

- **Description:** The club has successfully completed the educational module, has passed all required assessments, and met the minimum planning and implementation requirements.

- **Level 2: Basic Implementation**

- **Description:** The club has shown foundational understanding and applied the knowledge learned in a straightforward manner, with tangible, but initial improvements.
- **Key Indicators:**
 - Basic application of the module's content to existing policies, programs, or events.
 - Minimal but measurable changes in the club's operations.
 - Evidence of engagement with key stakeholders and change towards the targeted impact but limited depth in implementation.

- **Level 3: Intermediate Implementation**

- **Description:** The club has gone beyond basic implementation, demonstrating a solid understanding and application of the material. At this level, the institution shows clear improvements in the quality and structure of their programs or systems, with some integration of best practices.
- **Key Indicators:**
 - Clear improvements in governance, athlete wellness, event management, or financials with the integration of best practices.
 - Regular engagement and consultation with stakeholders (athletes, coaches, officials, parents, volunteers, PanAm Aquatics, etc.).
 - Demonstrated effort to refine and adapt the initial material to better fit the club's unique context.

- **Level 4: Advanced Implementation**

- **Description:** The club has demonstrated an advanced level of implementation, with **innovative solutions** and practices that significantly improve operations. These clubs showcase a high degree of sophistication in their approach, and the impact of their work is both **measurable** and **sustained**.
- **Key Indicators:**
 - Significant change in operations and tangible impact in the organization's initiatives and practices related to the subject matter.
 - **Innovative practices** and processes that serve as models for other clubs.
 - Clear evidence of **long-term sustainability**, with continuous feedback loops and a commitment to continuous improvement.

- **Level 5: Excellence in Implementation**

- **Description:** The club demonstrates **exceptional implementation** across all areas encompassed in the module's subject matter, setting a new benchmark for excellence in the country and the continent as a whole. The institution not only applies best practices but also leads the way in **transformational change**. They are **innovators** and have had

a **demonstrable positive and substantial impact** on their stakeholders and the aquatics community at large.

- **Key Indicators:**

- Tangible, long-term improvements concerning the subject matter's criteria. The demonstrate **sustained impact** with clear, quantifiable outcomes.
- Recognized as a **model institution** within the region or globally for their innovative and effective practices, serving not only as a guiding model but also as a mentor for other Clubs across the Americas. They not only display but also share their best practices and contributing to the growth of the aquatics community in our continent as a whole.

PanAm Aquatics Certified Club Badge

Once a Club has completed **all modules**, completing all three stages and receiving at least a **Level 1 PanAm Aquatics Module Mastery & Impact Badge** for each of the modules, it will be awarded the **PanAm Aquatics Certified Club Badge**. This prestigious badge recognizes Clubs that have successfully completed **all educational modules**, have demonstrated **impactful implementation** in each subject matter covered in the program, and excelled in their **commitment to excellence** across the entire program.

This badge signifies the Club's official status as a **PanAm Aquatics Certified Club**, a hallmark of quality, innovation, and sustainable practices in aquatics governance.

PanAm Aquatics Club Excellence Recognition

The **PanAm Aquatics Club Excellence Recognition** is designed to celebrate and reward clubs that go above and beyond in applying the knowledge and tools gained through the certification program. These awards are based on a holistic assessment of each club's overall performance across all aspects of safe sport, athlete wellness, development, project and event management, operational sustainability, and more. The recognition is divided into three tiers: **Bronze, Silver, and Gold**, with **Gold** representing the highest standard of excellence in the aquatics community across the Americas. The institution will receive a badge that recognizes their level of excellence recognition.

This recognition is not just a certificate of completion but an endorsement of a club's **innovation, impact, and sustainability** across all subject matters addressed within the certification program and other education and development initiatives spearheaded by PanAm Aquatics in transforming their organization into a high-performing, athlete-centered institution. The following include the criteria for excellence recognition levels:

Bronze Certified PAQ Institution: Foundations of Excellence

Clubs awarded the Bronze recognition have demonstrated a strong foundation in the implementation of the program's materials, showing clear improvements in multiple areas of their operations. These clubs have committed to the program's principles and have made measurable, positive

changes, setting the stage for continued development and growth. These have been well documented and are evidenced to have had sustained progress, with plans in place for continued improvement.

Silver Certified PAQ Institution: Advanced Excellence

Clubs awarded the Silver recognition have demonstrated advanced implementation and continual refinement of their operational processes. These clubs show strong leadership, consistently improve their operations, and have achieved meaningful, sustainable impacts in multiple areas. They are recognized for their commitment to **innovation**, **collaboration**, and **long-term development**. Moreover, the institution has evidence of successful partnerships, such as sponsorships, collaborations with other organizations, or community outreach programs as well as growing support for initiatives.

Gold Certified PAQ Institution: Excellence in Leadership and Transformational Impact

Clubs awarded the Gold recognition represent the pinnacle of excellence. These institutions have transformed their operations, not only surpassing the requirements of the certification program but also thinking outside the box and paving the path for other aquatic institutions. They are model organizations, demonstrating **exceptional leadership**, **innovative practices**, and **transformational impact** in aquatics, bolstering athlete support, garnering coach, parent, and volunteer development, building community, organizing high-quality events, fostering cohesive and beneficial stakeholder engagement, and supporting other facets of aquatics beyond the traditional governance approaches. Their initiatives have had a measurable, **sustained positive impact** on athletes, coaches, officials, parents, volunteers, and communities, and they serve as **leaders** in their field.

Excellence Recognition Criteria

The following section outlines key measurable metrics for each level of excellence—Bronze, Silver, and Gold—across the various program modules. While not an exhaustive list, these metrics serve as a foundation for assessing success and impact at each recognition level. They provide a clear framework to guide clubs in achieving and demonstrating meaningful progress, ensuring alignment with PanAm Aquatics' standards of leadership, innovation, and sustainability:

1. Safe Sport

Bronze

- Awareness of legal and ethical athlete protection frameworks.
- Basic safeguarding measures for athletes, coaches, staff, and parents.
- Development of a foundational safe sport policy.
- Initial implementation of athlete well-being programs.

Silver

- Comprehensive understanding and application of legal/ethical frameworks.
- Established and communicated safeguarding policies for all members.
- Active measures for risk reduction and abuse prevention.
- Creation of a safe, high-performing environment with structured training for coaches and staff.

- Regular review and updates to safeguarding protocols.

Gold

- Advanced legal and ethical standards fully integrated into all club activities.
- Proactive measures for safeguarding, with evidence of reporting and follow-up systems.
- Consistent fostering of high-performance environments that prioritize safety and respect.
- Regular workshops and continuous education on safe sport practices for all stakeholders.
- National or international recognition for Safe Sport practices.

2. Project and Event Management

Bronze

- Basic project planning skills with clear timelines and deliverables.
- Fundamental understanding of event budgeting and financial tracking.
- Risk assessment for events, including basic safety plans.
- Use of basic communication tools (emails, flyers, social media) for event promotion.

Silver

- Detailed project planning with defined milestones, timelines, and roles.
- Accurate and efficient budgeting practices for event development.
- Comprehensive risk management strategies, including contingency plans.
- Effective communication and marketing strategies across multiple platforms.
- Event impact analysis (feedback from participants and stakeholders).

Gold

- Exemplary project management processes with proven results and high stakeholder satisfaction.
- Sophisticated event budgeting with transparent financial reporting and cost efficiency.
- Robust risk management and emergency protocols consistently in place.
- Advanced marketing strategies with data-driven results, including partnerships and sponsorships.
- Events consistently ranked as highly successful and sustainable within the aquatics community.

3. Athlete Wellness

Bronze

- Basic understanding of mental health and physical wellness for athletes.
- Initial injury prevention and recovery protocols in place.
- Development of basic resources or initiatives focused on athlete well-being.
- Encouragement of mental health awareness in training environments.

Silver

- Implementation of structured mental health programs and physical wellness practices.
- Comprehensive injury prevention strategies with regular assessments.
- Ongoing initiatives for athlete mental health, including workshops and access to counseling services.
- Visible support for athlete well-being through regular communication and engagement.

Gold

- Holistic and individualized wellness plans for athletes, encompassing both mental and physical health.
- Proactive injury prevention with ongoing monitoring and recovery protocols.
- Advanced athlete wellness programs integrated into training, with measurable outcomes.
- Strong athlete-driven wellness committees that promote and maintain well-being across all levels.
- Recognition for exceptional athlete wellness standards within the wider community.

4. Coach Development

Bronze

- Coaches have access to basic certification and training opportunities.
- Foundation of creating effective athlete programs with basic performance goals.
- Introduction to coaching best practices and standards.
- Initial creation of support systems for coaches (peer mentorship, basic resources).

Silver

- Coaches hold current certifications in relevant aquatic disciplines and continue to develop professionally.
- Development of structured athlete programs with clear, progressive goals.
- Consistent adherence to coaching best practices, including feedback loops and performance reviews.
- Ongoing coaching education through workshops, webinars, and collaborative learning.
- Support systems for coaches that include regular mentoring and access to resources for personal growth.

Gold

- Coaches demonstrate exceptional levels of expertise, including specialized certifications or qualifications.
- Advanced and innovative athlete programs that reflect individualized coaching strategies.
- Best-in-class planning and management practices, including data-driven performance analytics.
- Coaching staff fully supported by a well-structured mentoring, feedback, and growth program.
- National/international recognition for coaching standards, with consistent leadership development opportunities.

5. Parent and Volunteer Development

Bronze

- Clear communication channels with parents and volunteers regarding club activities.
- Basic understanding of how parent and volunteer engagement supports club goals.
- Initial steps in building an inclusive culture for parents and volunteers.
- Development of basic orientation or training for new volunteers and parents.

Silver

- Established systems for parent and volunteer engagement with defined roles and responsibilities.
- Strong alignment between parent/volunteer efforts and the club's goals and values.
- Regular communication to keep parents informed and involved in the decision-making process.
- Structured training for volunteers, ensuring they understand and can support the club's mission.

Gold

- Active and ongoing recruitment, training, and retention strategies for parents and volunteers.
- Parents and volunteers are deeply integrated into club culture and decision-making processes.
- Robust volunteer management systems that empower and recognize contributions.
- Highly inclusive and supportive environment for parents and volunteers, with clear opportunities for growth.
- Nationally recognized parent and volunteer programs, serving as a model for other clubs.

Rewards & Incentives

To acknowledge the progress and commitment of clubs in the certification program, PanAm Aquatics will include several reward and recognition mechanisms based on scalable growth:

- **Badges:** Clubs can receive 3 types of badges upon successful completion and implementation of the certification program—the PanAm Aquatics Module Mastery and Impact badge (5 levels), the PanAm Aquatics Certified Club badge, and the PanAm Aquatics Clubs Excellence Recognition (Gold, Silver, and Bronze). These badges will be used as a form of recognition and can be displayed on club websites and in promotional materials.
- **Annual Certification:** The full certification program must be completed once, after which clubs will undergo an annual renewal process. Each year, clubs will participate in a refresher to maintain their certification, with the opportunity to upgrade recognition levels based on progress and impact. As changes in leadership, ownership, or governance occur, the certification will be re-evaluated to ensure alignment with current operations and adherence to PanAm Aquatics' standards.
- **Education and Development Clinics:** As part of the reward system, clubs that successfully complete the entirety of the certification program, earning the PanAm Aquatics Certified Club badge, will have the opportunity to have **PanAm Aquatics clinics** in their countries, providing education and development opportunities for local coaches, athletes, and other stakeholders.

- **Public Recognition:** PanAm Aquatics Certified Clubs will be recognized across PanAm Aquatics media and communication channels, establishing a new standard of excellence across the continent. Those awarded the PanAm Aquatics Club Excellence Recognition will also receive the privilege of hosting workshops, seminars, and conferences within the PanAm Aquatics network to serve as role models within our continental aquatic community and promote a culture of collaborative growth.
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Conclusion

The **PanAm Aquatics Club Certification Program** represents a bold step toward transforming the future of aquatics across the Americas. By empowering clubs with essential skills, knowledge, and resources, we create a vibrant, stronger, and more unified aquatic community in our continent capable of achieving sustained growth and success. Together, we will elevate the standard of aquatic sports, ensuring that athletes, coaches, parents, and volunteers are supported, protected, and empowered to reach their full potential.

The **PanAm Aquatics Aquatics Club Excellence Recognition** is designed to honor those clubs that embody the highest standards of leadership, athlete welfare, event management, and sustainable operations. These awards not only celebrate the hard work and dedication of clubs but also set a global benchmark for the future of aquatics in the Americas that creates a lasting impact.