



# **PanAm Aquatics National Federation 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 National Federation Badge	6
PanAm Aquatics National Federation 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 National Federation Certification Program** is a comprehensive and interactive initiative designed to equip National Federations across the Americas with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to build stronger, more efficient, and sustainable aquatic sports organizations. This certification program emphasizes growth and development in governance, management, athlete well-being, event coordination, project management, and operational best practices. By completing the certification program, national federations in the Americas will ensure they are operating at the highest standard, enhancing the experience for athletes, coaches, officials, and all stakeholders in the aquatic sports community.

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

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## Aims & Goals of the Certification Program

1. **Capacity Building:** Equip National Federations with the knowledge and tools needed to provide world-class support to athletes, coaches, and officials.
  2. **Strengthen Governance:** Promote transparent, accountable, and sustainable management of federations across the Americas.
  3. **Foster Collaboration:** Encourage cross-border 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 federation 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 National Federations must actively engage in the certification program, with attendance, participation, and performance tracking at every stage. Full involvement from federation leadership is required and staff as well as member participation is encouraged to demonstrate commitment to the initiative.
2. **Integrity Code:** Adherence to the PanAm Aquatics Integrity Code is mandatory. Federations 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:** National Federations will be assessed regularly through the submission of evaluations, proposals, and reports.

4. **Clear Documentation:** National Federations must document their progress and demonstrate how they have implemented key learning points into their operations and programs.
  5. **Completion of Requirements:** National Federations 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, National Federations 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. National Federations 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 National Federation, its leadership, or 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 National Federations. 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. **Governance and Leadership**
  - Understanding governance & leadership structures
  - Policies, compliance, and risk management
  - Financial management & resource allocation best practices
  - Media & communications
3. **Project and Event Management**
  - Project planning and management (e.g., timelines, resource allocation, etc.)
  - Event planning and budgeting
  - Risk management in events
  - Communications and marketing for events
4. **Safe Sport**
  - Legal and ethical frameworks for athlete protection
  - Safeguarding measures for athletes, coaches, officials, and National Federations
  - Developing high-performing environments
5. **Athlete Wellness**

- Mental health
  - Physical health and injury prevention
  - Building a culture of athlete well-being
  - Bolstering athlete committees & initiatives
6. **Coach and Official Development**
- Creating effective educational programs
  - Planning & management best practices
  - Support systems and initiatives
  - Certification and professional development standards
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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 national federation.
  2. **Stage 2: Evaluation (Comprehension and Testing)**  
After the education stage, National Federations 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 federation. Stage 3 will be successfully completed upon fulfilling the minimum implementation requirements, demonstrating the practical application of the knowledge acquired during the program.
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## Certification Structure Overview

To recognize the progress and completion of the PanAmAquatics National Federation Certification Program, we have developed a **three-tiered badge system** that will be awarded to National Federations 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 National Federations for completing the entire program with a prestigious **PanAm Aquatics Certified National Federation Badge**.

### PanAm Aquatics Module Mastery & Impact Badge

The **PanAm Aquatics Module Mastery & Impact Badge** will be awarded to National Federations 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 National Federation 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 National Federation 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 National Federation 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 National Federation'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 National Federation 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, PanAm Aquatics, etc.).
  - Demonstrated effort to refine and adapt the initial material to better fit the National Federation's unique context.

- **Level 4: Advanced Implementation**

- **Description:** The National Federation has demonstrated an advanced level of implementation, with **innovative solutions** and practices that significantly improve operations. These federations 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 institution's initiatives and practices related to the subject matter.
  - **Innovative practices** and processes that serve as models for other National Federations.
  - Clear evidence of **long-term sustainability**, with continuous feedback loops and a commitment to continuous improvement.

- **Level 5: Excellence in Implementation**

- **Description:** The National Federation 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 National Federations 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 National Federation Badge

Once a National Federation 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 Federation Badge**. This prestigious badge recognizes National Federations 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 National Federation's official status as a **PanAm Aquatics Certified National Federation**, a hallmark of quality, innovation, and sustainable practices in aquatics governance.

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## PanAm Aquatics National Federation Excellence Recognition

The **PanAm Aquatics National Federation Excellence Recognition** is designed to celebrate and reward National Federations 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 federation's overall performance across all aspects of governance, athlete wellness, development, 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 National Federation'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

**National Federations 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 federations 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

**National Federations awarded the Silver recognition** have demonstrated advanced implementation and continual refinement of their operational processes. These federations 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

**National Federations 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 and official 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, 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 National Federations in achieving and demonstrating meaningful progress, ensuring alignment with PanAm Aquatics' standards of leadership, innovation, and sustainability:

### 1. Governance and Leadership

#### Bronze

- **Documented governance structures:** Clear and functional leadership hierarchy, including board roles and responsibilities.

- **Implementation of basic policies:** Introduced or updated key policies, including governance, risk management, and financial procedures.
- **Compliance checks:** Conducted basic compliance reviews in line with PanAm Aquatics and regional standards.
- **Basic media presence:** Established a basic communication strategy to share updates and engage stakeholders through accessible media (website, social media).

#### Silver

- **Refined governance structures:** Governance and leadership roles are well-defined, with clear accountability mechanisms in place.
- **Comprehensive risk management:** Implemented proactive financial and operational risk management plans across programs and events.
- **Active community engagement:** Developed an advanced media and communications strategy to promote initiatives and foster transparency.
- **Leadership development:** Established mentorship or leadership development programs for federation leaders and emerging leaders.

#### Gold

- **Innovative governance practices:** Demonstrated exceptional leadership in governance, with transparent decision-making processes, robust compliance, and accountability.
- **Strategic financial sustainability:** Secured long-term financial health through diverse income streams (sponsorships, partnerships, grants).
- **Transformative media and communications:** Leading in innovative digital media strategies that connect with stakeholders and enhance federation visibility.
- **Collaborative leadership:** Actively collaborate with other federations, government agencies, and external stakeholders to drive initiatives.

## 2. Project and Event Management

#### Bronze

- **Basic project management:** Demonstrated successful planning and management of at least one federation event or project, with clear timelines and resource allocation.
- **Basic event budgeting:** Created event budgets with basic cost management and resource allocation strategies.
- **Risk management procedures:** Implemented basic risk management plans for events.
- **Effective event communication:** Utilized basic marketing channels (social media, website) to promote events and attract participants.

#### Silver

- **Advanced project planning:** Established detailed project plans for events, including timelines, resource allocation, and stakeholder involvement.
- **Optimized event budgeting:** Showed financial proficiency by managing large-scale events with a detailed, efficient budget.



- **Proactive risk management:** Integrated comprehensive risk assessments and mitigation strategies into event planning.
- **Strategic event marketing:** Enhanced marketing strategies, incorporating partnerships and sponsorships for broader outreach and higher participation.

#### Gold

- **Complex project leadership:** Led multi-faceted projects or large-scale international events, demonstrating advanced project management practices.
- **Sustainable event operations:** Ensured the long-term sustainability of events, with measurable positive impacts (e.g., increased participation, media attention, stakeholder satisfaction).
- **Comprehensive risk management systems:** Implemented industry-leading risk management practices, ensuring safety and operational excellence.
- **Exemplary marketing and outreach:** Pioneered innovative marketing campaigns that set new standards in event promotion across the region.

### 3. Safe Sport

#### Bronze

- **Basic integrity frameworks:** Developed foundational legal and ethical safeguards for athlete protection, including codes of conduct and basic reporting systems.
- **Safeguarding measures:** Established the first steps towards ensuring athlete, coach, and official safety through policies or training.
- **Compliance with PanAm Aquatics standards:** Demonstrated basic adherence to Safe Sport regulations and guidelines.

#### Silver

- **Enhanced safeguarding protocols:** Implemented more comprehensive athlete protection measures, such as background checks, ethics training, and anonymous reporting systems.
- **Promoting safe environments:** Developed and implemented policies that create a high-performing, respectful environment for all athletes and staff.
- **Regular Safe Sport training:** Conducted regular educational initiatives to keep stakeholders (athletes, coaches, staff) informed on ethical guidelines and safety practices.

#### Gold

- **Comprehensive legal and ethical leadership:** Established a culture of safety and respect throughout the federation, with clear structures for accountability.
- **Innovative safeguarding practices:** Created new programs, such as workshops or awareness campaigns, to elevate Safe Sport standards beyond compliance.
- **Influence across the region:** Actively contributed to PanAm Aquatics' Safe Sport initiatives, mentoring other federations and setting new standards in athlete protection.

## 4. Athlete Wellness

### Bronze

- **Basic wellness initiatives:** Introduced foundational athlete wellness programs focusing on physical and mental health.
- **Well-being policy development:** Developed the first steps towards formalizing athlete wellness through policy frameworks.
- **Basic athlete feedback channels:** Established channels for athletes to voice wellness concerns.

### Silver

- **Comprehensive wellness programs:** Expanded athlete wellness programs to cover mental health, injury prevention, and long-term athlete development.
- **Support systems in place:** Established dedicated wellness teams, including medical professionals, psychologists, and wellness coaches.
- **Athlete well-being monitoring:** Instituted regular wellness check-ins or feedback surveys to gauge the impact and success of wellness programs.

### Gold

- **Holistic athlete development:** Implemented advanced programs that focus on both the physical and mental well-being of athletes throughout their careers.
- **Systematic wellness integration:** Integrated wellness practices into all aspects of training, competition, and federation culture.
- **National leadership in wellness:** Became a recognized leader in athlete wellness, developing innovative programs that set a regional or global standard for wellness in aquatics.

## 5. Coach and Official Development

### Bronze

- **Basic coaching and official programs:** Established entry-level coaching certification programs and training for officials.
- **Initial support for coaches and officials:** Introduced mentorship or basic development opportunities for coaches and officials.
- **Basic training systems:** Developed clear pathways for ongoing certification and development for both coaches and officials.

### Silver

- **Comprehensive education programs:** Developed advanced, structured training programs for both coaches and officials, with clear progression pathways.
- **Support structures for growth:** Established mentorship programs or regular performance evaluations for coaches and officials.
- **Collaboration for growth:** Partnered with other organizations, universities, or experts to provide high-quality development opportunities for coaches and officials.

Gold

- **National and regional leadership:** Developed and implemented world-class coaching and official development programs that set industry standards.
  - **Ongoing professional development:** Created continuous learning environments for coaches and officials, with regular updates and feedback on best practices.
  - **Influence across the region:** Actively contributed to coaching and officiating standards on a regional or international level, sharing resources and knowledge with other federations.
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## Rewards & Incentives

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

- **Badges:** National Federations 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 National Federation badge, and the PanAm Aquatics National Federations Excellence Recognition (Gold, Silver, and Bronze). These badges will be used as a form of recognition and can be displayed on National Federation websites and in promotional materials.
  - **Annual Certification:** The full certification program must be completed once, after which federations will undergo an annual renewal process. Each year, federations 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 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, National Federations that successfully complete the entirety of the certification program, earning the PanAm Aquatics Certified National Federation badge, will have the opportunity to have **PanAm Aquatics clinics** in their countries, providing education and development opportunities for local coaches, athletes, and officials.
  - **Public Recognition:** PanAm Aquatics Certified National Federations will be recognized across PanAm Aquatics media and communication channels, establishing a new standard of excellence across the continent. Those awarded the PanAm Aquatics National Federation 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 National Federation Certification Program** represents a bold step toward transforming the future of aquatics across the Americas. By empowering National Federations 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, and officials are supported, protected, and empowered to reach their full potential.

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