

NEVADA CAVE SURVEY

Membership Definition & Tiered Access Policy

Defining Who We Are, What We Expect, and How People Advance

Section 1 — Founding Philosophy

The Nevada Cave Survey was not born in a conference room. It was built the same way every worthwhile caving relationship is built — through showing up, earning trust, and demonstrating that you belong underground. This policy reflects that origin.

The following philosophy is drawn from the direct experience of NCS founder Adam Haydock, whose history with caves spans Chicago grottos, Indiana limestone, TAG, cave diving, Mexico, and years of ridgewalking Nevada's remote ranges. The principles here are not abstract ideals — they are hard-won observations from someone who went through every tier of this process himself.

“This is more of an ode to exploration — and the dissension of information that plagued this state since exploration started.”

— Adam Haydock, NCS Founder

Core Values That Define NCS Membership

01

Curiosity is the qualification.

You don't have to be a scientist to explore caves — scientists can join you. The NCS welcomes everyone who brings genuine curiosity, humility, and a willingness to learn. Credentials do not replace showing up. Showing up does not replace integrity.

02

Respect those who came before you.

The caves we explore were found, mapped, and protected by people who invested years before you knew they existed. Respect the former explorers and the gatekeepers. We are all trying to protect these delicate places in the best way we know how.

03

Do what nobody else is willing to do. Go further.

Ridgewalking is hard. Survey is tedious. Rigging takes practice and demands precision. The NCS values people who choose the hard path — who go further when it would be easier to stop. Choose your narrative: it is a win every time you go.

04

Protect but collaborate.

A generation of Nevada cavers spent years rediscovering caves that already had names because the people who found them refused to share. That time cannot be recovered. The NCS exists to break that cycle — protecting sensitive locations responsibly while collaborating so future generations do not have to start from zero.

05

Inspire curiosity. Don't inhibit it.

Your influence as an experienced caver will be far more impactful than merely being an obstacle. The way you treat a new person at their first trip shapes whether they spend the next twenty years contributing to this mission or walking away. Inspire. Mentor. Know when it is time to step aside.

06

Build the reference experience.

Reference experience is what allows you to commit fully — to caves, to teams, to hard decisions underground. Every trip, every survey shot, every ridge you walk builds the foundation that allows you to trust yourself and be trusted by others. The NCS tier system is a reflection of that accumulated experience.

07

Pass the torch.

All we ask is that you remember the work that was put in so you can enjoy caving, and that you pass the torch — to protect and respect caves. Our presence impacts the cave in ways we may not even be able to see. Act accordingly.

“Protect, but collaborate for future generations — to keep exploration purposeful and respect each other's time.”

— Adam Haydock

Section 2 — How Trust Is Earned: The Origin of This System

The tier system in this document was not invented — it was observed. It is the same process that Adam Haydock went through as a young caver who found the Windy City Grotto through a janky website and showed up at a pizza meeting where nobody said much to him.

He took the initiative. He introduced himself. He earned a spot on a trip to Suicide Cave in Indiana. He showed up early, drove the extra hours, bought the gear, and went six hours underground on his first real cave. Nobody handed him access to the trip list because he asked for it. He earned it — one trip at a time.

“I think it was the exclusivity of access to these secretive places that got me intrigued.”

— Adam Haydock

That process — showing up, earning a sponsor, participating, building trust — is exactly what the NCS tier system formalizes. The structure below is not bureaucracy. It is respect for the process that every serious caver eventually goes through anyway, made transparent and fair.

The Information Problem We Are Solving

The Problem (History)	The NCS Commitment (Future)
A generation of Nevada cavers spent a decade rediscovering caves because those who found them refused to share coordinates, trip notes, or even that a cave existed. This secretive culture — born from valid concerns about protection — ultimately harmed the thing it intended to protect. Time was wasted. Relationships fractured. Caves were damaged by people who found them without context. The NCS acknowledges this history without shame and without repeating it.	The NCS will share information — cave locations, survey data, field findings — with people who have demonstrated the judgment to handle it responsibly. The tier system is not secrecy. It is sequencing. Information flows to the people who have earned the trust to receive it. That is the only sustainable path to both exploration and protection. History does not have to repeat itself. That is a conscious choice.

Section 3 — How Peer Organizations Define Membership

Before defining NCS tiers, it is useful to understand how peer organizations handle this question.

Organization	Key Membership Approach
NSS National	Three tiers: Introductory, Regular, and Life. Officers must be NSS members. Focus is on dues, not demonstrated activity.
NSS Western Region	Covers CA, NV, OR, WA grottos. Individuals may participate but voting rights are reserved for chartered grottos. NCS's internal tier structure fills this governance gap for Nevada.
NSS Grottos (general)	Most grottos require attendance at 2–3 events before full membership. Two tiers are common: Associate (trial, limited voting) and Regular/Full (NSS member, voting, office-eligible). Honorary by supermajority for long-term contributors.
Windy City Grotto (IL)	The grotto through which NCS founder Adam Haydock entered caving. Trust-based entry: attend a meeting, meet the group, earn a sponsor to go on your first trip. The standard was informal but the expectation was clear — you earn your way in.

NCRC	A training-credential hierarchy: OCR Orientation, Level 1 Task Force Member, Level 2 Task Force Leader, Level 3 Vertical Specialist. Each level builds on demonstrated field skill. No level is honorary — you earn each one.
Southern Nevada Grotto	NSS-affiliated Las Vegas grotto, active since 1974. Membership restricted to current NSS members. Access to group communications restricted to current members.

Section 4 — The NCS Three-Group Communication Structure

The NCS operates three communication groups, each with a different level of access and sensitivity. Tier determines which groups a person can access. This structure directly addresses the information dissension problem that set back Nevada caving by a decade — access is earned, not assumed.

Group	What Is Shared	Who Can Access
Ridgewalking Group (Facebook Chat)	Trip invitations, ridgewalking outings, surface exploration, general interest posts, beginner-friendly content	Open to Interested Parties (Tier 1) and above. Anyone expressing interest may be added.
Leads Group (Private Chat)	Call-outs for emergencies, GPS coordinates to caves, logistics & meet-up info, gear lists, field findings and discoveries	Active Members (Tier 3) and Full Members (Tier 4) only. Strictly controlled.
NCS Survey Chat (Board Group)	Overarching organizational topics, board discussions, policy, survey data, sensitive cave information, strategic planning	Full Members (Tier 4) and Board only.

Section 5 — Membership Tier System Overview

The NCS uses a four-tier membership system. Movement through the tiers is based on demonstrated participation, community trust, and contribution — not dues or time elapsed alone. Each tier unlocks access to specific communication groups and responsibilities.

TIER 1 Interested Party	TIER 2 Associate Member	TIER 3 Active Member	TIER 4 Full Member
Ridgewalking Group only	Ridgewalking Group only	Ridgewalking + Leads Group	All three groups

Section 6 — Tier Definitions

Tier 1 — Interested Party

Curiosity is enough to get in the door — consistency is what opens the next one.

Definition

An Interested Party has expressed interest in participating in NCS activities. They may have attended a ridgewalk, asked about trips, or been referred by a member. No formal application has been submitted.

Requirements

- ✓ Has made contact with an NCS member expressing interest
- ✓ May have attended a ridgewalk, surface outing, or public NCS event
- ✓ Has NOT yet submitted a formal application or references

Access & Privileges

- ✓ May be added to the Ridgewalking Group Facebook chat
- ✓ May attend surface ridgewalks and beginner outings with an NCS member present
- ✗ No access to the Leads Group or NCS Survey Chat
- ✗ No access to cave coordinates, call-out lists, or logistical data
- ✗ No voting rights; no NCS role eligibility

Path to Tier 2

Submit a completed NCS membership application, provide 3 references (see Section 7), and sign the NCS Code of Conduct. Applications are reviewed by the Board.

Tier 2 — Associate Member

Onboarded and welcomed. Now build the reference experience that makes you someone we trust underground.

Definition

An Associate Member has completed the formal onboarding process and been accepted by the Board. They are part of the NCS community and are building their involvement. Associate membership is generally a 6–12 month period before Tier 3 is considered.

This mirrors the experience of the NCS founder: showing up at the WCG pizza meeting, introducing himself, and earning a sponsor to go on his first trip — not because he demanded access, but because he invested the effort to belong.

Requirements

- ✓ Submitted a completed NCS membership application
- ✓ Provided 3 personal references (at least 1 must be a current NCS Tier 3 or Tier 4 member)
- ✓ Signed and returned the NCS Code of Conduct

- ✓ References contacted and responded positively
- ✓ Application reviewed and approved by a majority of the NCS Board

Access & Privileges

- ✓ Full access to the Ridgewalking Group Facebook chat
- ✓ May participate in ridgewalks, surface surveys, and cave trips when led by a Tier 3 or Tier 4 member
- ✓ Formally recognized as an NCS participant in trip records
- ✗ No access to the Leads Group or NCS Survey Chat
- ✗ No voting rights; not eligible for any officer or board role

Path to Tier 3

See Tier 3 requirements below. There is no automatic promotion. Advancement requires a board review and vote after a demonstrated track record.

Tier 3 — Active Member

Do what nobody else is willing to do. Go further. This is the tier where that standard is recognized.

Definition

An Active Member has proven — through observable action — that they are reliable, safety-conscious, and genuinely invested in the NCS mission. Active Members are trusted with access to sensitive operational information because their judgment has been demonstrated, not assumed.

Ridgewalking is hard. But choose your narrative: it is a win every time you go. Active Members are the people who keep showing up — and the NCS recognizes that.

Requirements

All of the following must be satisfied:

- ✓ Has held Associate Member status for a minimum of 6 months
- ✓ Has participated in at least 3 documented NCS activities within the past 12 months
- ✓ Has invested personal time and/or resources in support of NCS activities — not merely attended as a guest
- ✓ Has demonstrated safe caving behavior in the field, confirmed by at least one Tier 4 member or Board member
- ✓ Code of Conduct remains in good standing with no unresolved issues
- ✓ Advancement approved by majority vote of the NCS Board

Examples of qualifying contributions:

- ✓ Led or co-led a ridgewalk, survey team, or rig-and-explore trip
- ✓ Contributed survey data, sketches, or map data submitted to NCS records
- ✓ Completed NCRC Orientation to Cave Rescue (OCR) or Level 1 training
- ✓ Purchased, maintained, or loaned personal gear for group use

- ✓ Participated in conservation or restoration work at a Nevada cave site
- ✓ Learned geology and tools relevant to Nevada cave exploration and applied that knowledge in the field

Access & Privileges

- ✓ Full access to the Ridgewalking Group
- ✓ Access to the Leads Group — including emergency call-outs, cave GPS coordinates, logistics, and field findings
- ✓ May be designated as trip leader for NCS outings
- ✓ May sponsor an Associate Member's application as one of the three required references
- ✓ Eligible to nominate others for tier advancement
- ✗ No access to the NCS Survey Chat (Board group)
- ✗ No voting rights on organizational governance or board matters

Annual Renewal

Active Member status requires annual reaffirmation. A member who has not participated in any documented NCS activity within 12 months may be reviewed and moved to Associate pending renewed engagement. Members will be notified before any change is made.

Tier 4 — Full Member

Remember the work. Pass the torch. Know when it is time to step aside.

Definition

A Full Member has made a sustained, significant contribution to the NCS over time. They are trusted with all organizational information, including board-level discussions, sensitive cave data, and strategic decisions. Full Members are the people who have put in the money, effort, and time that distinguishes them from the broader participant pool.

Full Members carry a special obligation: to inspire curiosity without inhibiting it, to mentor those coming up behind them, and to know when it is time to step aside and let the next generation lead.

Requirements

- ✓ Has held Active Member status for a minimum of 12 months
- ✓ Has participated in at least 6 documented NCS activities within the past 18 months
- ✓ Has demonstrated leadership — leading trips, mentoring members, contributing data, or advancing an NCS project
- ✓ Has made meaningful personal investment: gear, fuel, supplies, time, or financial contribution to an NCS activity
- ✓ No unresolved conduct violations
- ✓ Is nominated by a current Full Member or Board member
- ✓ Advancement approved by 2/3 supermajority vote of the full Board

Access & Privileges

- ✓ Full access to all three NCS communication groups
- ✓ Access to all cave GPS coordinates, sensitive field data, and board-level discussions
- ✓ Voting rights on all NCS organizational matters
- ✓ Eligible to hold NCS officer or board positions
- ✓ May nominate individuals for any tier including Tier 4
- ✓ May serve as required Tier 4 sponsor for new nominations

Full Member Obligations

Full Members hold the NCS's history and future simultaneously. They are expected to actively mentor Associate and Active Members — not as gatekeepers, but as guides. They are expected to celebrate the success of those they brought up. And when the time comes, they are expected to step aside and pass the torch with grace.

Annual reaffirmation required. A Full Member inactive for 18+ consecutive months may be reviewed and moved to Active Member status pending renewed engagement.

Section 7 — References & Code of Conduct

All applicants for Associate Membership (Tier 2) must submit three references and sign the NCS Code of Conduct. These are not checkboxes — they are the beginning of a trust-based relationship modeled on the same standard that serious caving organizations have held for decades.

Three References — Requirements	Code of Conduct — Core Obligations
✓ At least 1 must be a current NCS Tier 3 or Tier 4 member ✓ References must speak to character, reliability, and attitude toward safety ✓ Non-caving references (employers, community orgs) are acceptable if they speak to character ✓ The Board may contact references directly; notify them in advance ✓ False or uninformed references are grounds for immediate rejection <i>References exist to protect the group. NCS members share sensitive location data and operate in hazardous environments. Trust is the minimum standard — not a guarantee of advancement.</i>	✓ Maintain safe caving practices; never pressure others underground ✓ Protect cave resources — take nothing, leave nothing, disturb nothing unnecessarily ✓ Handle all cave coordinates and sensitive location data with strict discretion — never share outside NCS ✓ Treat fellow members with respect regardless of experience level ✓ Inspire curiosity in newer members — be a guide, not an obstacle ✓ Abide by all land management rules for caves on federal, state, or private land ✓ Celebrate the successes of your team members

- ✓ Report unsafe behavior or conduct violations to the Board promptly

Violations may result in a warning, tier demotion, suspension, or permanent removal depending on severity.

Section 8 — The Explorer's Pledge

Every NCS member — at every tier — is asked to hold the following commitments. These are not rules with enforcement mechanisms. They are the ideals that define what it means to be part of this survey and exploration community. They are drawn directly from the experience and reflections of those who built it.

“All I ask is that you remember us — the work we put in so you can enjoy caving — and pass the torch to protect and respect caves.”

— Adam Haydock

As a member of the Nevada Cave Survey, I pledge:

I will go further.

When it would be easier to stop, turn around, or disengage, I will go the extra distance — for the survey, for the team, for the mission.

I will respect those who came before me.

The caves I enter were found, mapped, and protected by people who invested years before I arrived. I will honor that investment.

I will protect but share.

I will guard sensitive cave locations from those who have not earned the trust to receive them, and share them generously with those who have.

I will inspire, not inhibit.

When I encounter someone newer, less skilled, or less experienced than me, my first instinct will be to invite and encourage — not to gatekeep. My influence will be to expand the mission, not shrink it.

I will learn.

I will invest in learning the geology, the tools, the techniques, and the history of the caves I explore. Curiosity brought me here — it will keep me growing.

I will celebrate success.

Every ridgewalk completed, every shot surveyed, every new passage documented is worth celebrating. I will not take that for granted.

I will pass the torch.

When my time in a leadership role is done, I will step aside with grace and invest in the person who comes next. The NCS belongs to the future as much as the present.

I will remember why I started.

Caves are extraordinary places. I will not let the politics, the logistics, or the hard days make me forget that.

Section 9 — Applying This Policy to Existing Participants

At the time this policy is adopted, the NCS has existing participants who pre-date this formal tier system. The Board will conduct a one-time placement review to assign each current participant to the appropriate tier based on their observed history of engagement.

Profile Description	Starting Tier
Has expressed interest only; not been on a trip or submitted any application	Tier 1 — Interested Party
Has been on trips but has not submitted references or signed Code of Conduct	Tier 1 or 2 depending on Board judgment; must complete onboarding requirements
Has completed onboarding, been on some trips, but participation has been limited or inconsistent	Tier 2 — Associate Member
Has demonstrated consistent participation, invested personal time and resources, shows safe behavior, and currently holds Leads Group access	Tier 3 — Active Member
Has been a core contributor over an extended period — leading trips, mentoring others, contributing data, investing significantly — and participates in board-level discussions	Tier 4 — Full Member

Participants placed at Tier 1 or Tier 2 must complete all applicable onboarding requirements within 60 days of policy adoption or will be removed from NCS communication groups until requirements are met.

Section 10 — Advancement, Appeals & Conduct Procedures

Advancement Process	Appeals Process	Conduct & Removal
Any Active or Full Member may nominate another participant for tier advancement by submitting a written recommendation to the Board.	A participant who believes their tier placement or denial was in error may appeal in writing to the Board Chair within 30 days.	A written petition signed by at least 2 NCS members may initiate a conduct review.

Majority vote required for Tier 3. Two-thirds supermajority required for Tier 4. The applicant is notified of the outcome and tier is updated immediately upon approval.	The Board reviews at the next scheduled meeting. The member may submit supporting documentation. The Board's decision on an appeal is final.	The accused member is notified in writing and given at least 21 days before the Board hearing. Outcomes may include: formal warning, tier demotion, suspension, or permanent removal. Removal requires a 2/3 Board vote.
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Closing Statement

“Inspire curiosity, don't inhibit it. Your influence will be more impactful than merely being an obstacle. Know when it's time to step aside.”

— Adam Haydock

The Nevada Cave Survey is not just a survey organization. It is a community built around the belief that these places are worth protecting, worth exploring, and worth passing on. The tiers in this document are not hierarchy for its own sake — they are the structure that allows this community to grow without losing the trust and discretion that protect the very places that drew us here.

We remember those who came before. We work alongside those who are here now. We prepare the path for those who come next.

— Nevada Cave Survey

Version	Date	Notes
1.0 Draft	March 2026	Initial draft of tier system. Research-based, peer org comparisons included.
2.0 Draft	March 2026	Integrated founding philosophy, Explorer's Pledge, and origin narrative from Adam Haydock's writings. Added information problem framing.