

Agency Administrator Coach-Shadow Guide

April 2015

During Wildfire Incidents Agency Administrators (AA) must be prepared to make critical and informed wildfire management decisions related to land and assets under their span of authority. Classroom training is a good foundation yet, many AA's lack experience in the practical application of that classroom training on wildfire incidents. The coach-shadow program provides AA's lacking fire experience the opportunity to perform as an AA, with the oversight of a coach as an advisor. With a Coach's guidance, an AA will learn to apply policy and classroom training to an actual large and/or complex wildfire incident.

A coaching/mentoring program was initiated in 2007 to provide on-the-ground experience for an Agency Administrators. The AA program has evolved substantially and shadowing opportunities are essential for preparing Line Officers to act as Agency Administrators during wildland fires or other critical incidents. From here forward this program will be referred to as the Coach-Shadow program (Hubbard memo 2015).

Objectives:

The objective of this program is to develop and enhance knowledge, skills and abilities to perform in the role as an Agency Administrator. The goal is to increase line officer's understanding of concepts and principles in alignment with incident complexity. This is achieved by:

- Allowing the AA trainee to work through the various aspects of an incident with an experienced Coach as an advisor.
- Allowing AA trainees to participate in Coach/Shadow team assignments.

Eligibility:

The Agency Administrator Coaching Program is available to any Agency Administrator. It is also available as a career development tool at the discretion of the Regional Forester and Forest Supervisor. Criteria to be a trainee include:

- AA on unit that the fire is occurring, and has not met core training requirements.
- An individual currently serving as a federal AA with fire management responsibilities.
- An individual the agency is training or has the potential to be an AA.
- Is seeking to enhance their knowledge and responsibilities as an AA responsible for fire management in a practical application setting;
- The person also must have become eligible for the program in accordance with Redbook AA training requirements – (Redbook Chapter 5).

Program Guidance:

Each Region should establish a regional coordinator responsible for implementation of the Coach-Shadow program throughout fire season. The Coordinator will maintain the list of qualified AA's (and levels), Coaches, Trainees, and their availability, and finds personnel to fill requests. The following are helpful suggestions for successful implementation:

- Develop a mechanism or point of contact in order to deploy Coach-Shadow Teams and Agency Administrators, e.g. establish an AA coordinator.
- A Regional LOT may review AA trainee documentation and make certification recommendations to the Regional Forester.
- Identify AA Coaches and priority trainees.

Coaches

Requirements

- Must be certified at "Journey" level line officer in dealing with large fire incident, or rated at an experience level commensurate with the incident being managed.
- Is currently or has served as an AA previously, including retirees and still have the aptitude and knowledge to serve in this role.
- Is willing and able to serve as a coach and remain committed to the trainee.
- Have a clear understanding of risk based decisions for selected strategies.

Role

The role of the Coach is to advise and support (but not replace) the AA as they work through the various aspects of an incident. A coach allows the AA to be the decision maker while providing the oversight that allows the AA to gain the knowledge and understanding of their roles and responsibilities as described in the 2015 Interagency Standards for Fire and Aviation Operations – RedBook – Chapter 5. The role of the coach includes but not limited to:

- Support, teach, and advise trainee- or lesser experienced AA.
- Support may be for the purpose of assisting lesser experienced AA during a complex incident, or to assist AA or AA(T) with advancing skills and qualifications.
- May coach one-on-one or a group of trainees.
- Participate in a brief annual "coach the coaches" refresher and pre-season preparation.

Role with a team of shadows

- Communicate with receiving AA and Region. Establish point(s) of contact. See if in-brief is possible.
- Set up training opportunities, such as site visits.
- Communicate with trainees (team) about logistics and schedule.
- Cover logistics such as meeting place and transportation during the assignment.
- Monitor incident activity for other opportunities within the geographic area.
- Facilitate engagement and dialogue of team members.
- Documents experiences and level of engagement of trainee(s), but does not provide *evaluation* for shadow assignments. Documentation will include the following questions:
 1. What did you observe?
 2. What did you participate in?
 3. How did you engage?
 4. What did you learn?

Lead an evaluation with the group at the end of the assignment.

Coach Attributes

- Adaptable to changing demands.
- General understanding of the “Big Picture” functions of an Agency Administrator.
- Understands value-based leadership and its role in decision-making.
- Solid communicator especially in areas of providing feedback (instructional and motivational feedback), facilitating unbiased discussions, and will ask open-ended questions to generate discussions.
- Aptitude to work in stressful situations in a professional manner, and be willing to share concerns as a coach.

The duration of the coaching assignment will be negotiated by the Regional Forester and Forest Supervisor. Assignment length will depend on experience level of trainee and discussions with the next level Agency Administrator and the assigned coach. If a need arises for the Coach to unexpectedly return to their home unit, the coach will not leave until a replacement coach has arrived. A back-up coach should be pre-identified.

Shadows

A *Shadow* is a trainee or lower-qualified AA not performing the duty of AA, but is observing a qualified designated AA during an incident for the purpose of increasing understanding of the duties. The shadow may participate as an individual or part of a group of trainees.

- Maintain a journal or other form of documentation of experiences.
- Remain flexible to possible changes in the schedule.
- Actively observe, e.g. ask questions and be engaged.
- Be prepared to travel in active fire areas. Communicate with Coach about what clothing, gear, or supplies may be needed for the assignment.

It is essential trainees are exposed to the decision environment associated with early phases of wildfire operations and not just “large fire events”. The early phases may include the day preceding an anticipated upward surge in wildfire activity, as well as the initial attack and extended attack phases. To meet this need a Coach may be “pre-positioned” to areas forecasted to be at “imminent risk” for an outbreak of heightened wild fire activity.

During the coaching assignment, every effort will be made to help the trainee learn about the core competencies, consistent with the Fire Doctrine Principles:

- Safety
- Strategies and tactics for Cost Containment
- Incident Management Processes
- Understanding of decision support tools
- Situational Awareness of resource availability and allocation
- WFDSS
- Monitoring and Evaluation of fire operations
- Risk Management and Strategic Risk Assessment
- Social/Political awareness and interpersonal relations

To help accomplish these needs the trainee will gain experience in as many of the following elements as practical (refer to the AA Learning Action Plan – 2015)

- Risk Management and Decision Tools
- Incident Management Team Interactions
- External Relationships and Coordination
- Overall Program Management

Coach-Shadow Team

The Coach-Shadow Team replaces the concept of “LOST” (Line Officer Strike Team). The goal of coach-shadow assignments is to provide exposure to a variety of situations that an AA encounters during an incident. It is an *observational* learning assignment; certification recommendations should be reserved for active trainee assignments where tasks are being performed.

- Small groups of 3-5 people
- Short-term assignment, not full duration of incident
- Be prepared to visit active fire areas.
- Opportunities may exist to visit multiple incidents.
- Works best to travel in 1 vehicle
- Works best if team has similar certification levels

Documentation

Agency Administrators that participate in the coaching program as a trainee will have their coaching documented. The coach will document each completed task on the Agency Administrator Learning Action Plan for the trainee. Evaluation and feedback should be sought by the trainee from the coach and vice versa. The Learning Action Plan can be used for multiple incidents as a long term record of experiences.

Agency Administrator Delegations:

For every incident, there needs to be a conscious decision made to insure there is a delegated AA certified to the level commensurate with the complexity of incident. For example when the home unit’s Line Officer is not qualified at an Agency Administrator level commensurate with the complexity of the incident a decision will need to be made to provide the unit with an Agency Administrator who can provide the oversight and coaching. Potential solutions include but aren’t limited too:

- RF retains AA authority for the incident. Unit’s ‘unqualified’ LO remains in place and uses the incident as a training opportunity under the guidance of a qualified Coach.
- RF delegates AA authority to a fully qualified AA of the appropriate level, who may be from a different unit than the host unit of the incident, and allows the host unit LO to remain with the delegated AA either as a Shadow or trainee AA.

- RF retains AA authority but assigns a Regional Forester’s Rep to the host unit. The RF Rep is an AA who is qualified at the appropriate level, and may coach the host unit’s LO.
- RF assigns a qualified AA to the host unit for the incident. The LO continues to provide local area expertise, but does not perform AA duties for the incident.

Definitions:

Acting Agency Administrator

The *Acting AA* is a fully certified AA at the level required by the incident complexity, who temporarily becomes the delegated AA in order to provide relief and support. An Acting AA may be requested in situations such as long duration incidents, multiple incidents, or the primary AA’s need.

Agency Administrator

An Agency Administrator is the official responsible for the management of a geographic unit or functional area. Agency Administrators are the managing officer of an agency, division thereof, or jurisdiction having statutory responsibilities for incident mitigation and management. Some examples include: NPS Park Superintendent, BIA Agency Superintendent, USFS Forest Supervisor, BLM District Manager, FWS Refuge Manager, State Forester, Tribal Chairperson, Fire Chief, and Police Chief. Redbook chapter 11.

Agency Administrator Representative

The Agency Administrator Representative (the on-scene Agency Administrator) is responsible for representing the political, social, and economic issues of the Agency Administrator to the Incident Commander. This is accomplished by participating in the Agency Administrator briefing, in the IMT planning and strategy meetings and in the operational briefings. (Redbook chapter 11). In addition, performance of AA Rep duties may be used towards certification at for the next-level Agency Administrator.

AA Trainee

An *Agency Administrator trainee [AA(T)]* is working on certification by performing the role of AA or AA Rep by working under the supervision and authority of a qualified AA. The duties assigned to the trainee may include AA duties not related to decision making, depending on factors such as whether or not the trainee is from the host unit and current level of qualification.

Coach

A *Coach* is a fully qualified Agency Administrator at journey or advanced level. (Position of “Coach” does not formally exist, but is key to increasing the number and capacity of qualified AA’s. AA’s who are qualified and willing to be coaches will be determined by each Region, e.g. by Regional LOT.)

- Support, teach, and advise trainee- or lesser experienced AA.

- Support may be for the purpose of assisting lesser experienced AA during a complex incident, or to assist AA or AA(T) with advancing skills and qualifications.
- May coach on-on-one or a group of trainees.
- Documents experiences of the AA(T) during incident or assignment.

Coach-Shadow Team

A *Coach – Shadow Team* is comprised of a qualified journey- or advanced AA acting as the Coach, and group of Shadows who may travel to multiple incidents and support sites to increase levels of understanding. This was previously known as LOST – Line Officer Strike Team.

Line Officer

A Forest Service official who serves in a direct line of command from the Chief and has been delegated authority to make and execute decisions for their administrative unit(s). Examples are the deputy chiefs, Director of Law Enforcement and Investigations, regional foresters, station directors, forest supervisors, and district rangers. Line officers have authority to issue direction within delegated levels.

Shadow

A *Shadow* is not performing the duty of AA, but is observing a qualified designated AA during an incident for the purpose of increasing understanding of the duties. The shadow may participate as an individual or part of a group of trainees.

Regional Forester Representative

To serve as a RF Rep, an AA must be qualified at the level mandated by the incident complexity. For example, a Type I incident would require an advanced level AA to act as Regional Foresters Representative.