

SEAPA Training Program

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need to be a US citizen to apply?

Yes. You must be a US Citizen and hold a valid USCG License to apply.

What license do I need to apply and if I get in, how fast can I go in the Training Program?

Applicants need a minimum of a 1600 Master's license to apply (please also see important information regarding the ability to receive an unlimited Federal Pilotage endorsement from the USCG Juneau REC).

Once accepted into the SEAPA Training Program, Trainees are categorized as either Deputy Trainees or Apprentice Trainees.

The Deputy Trainee program is for candidates with at least the sea service referenced below (AK statute 08.62.093):

- (1)** one year of service as a master on ocean or coastwise vessels while holding a United States Coast Guard license as master of ocean steam or motor vessels of any gross tons; OR
- (2)** two years of service as a master on United States Coast Guard inspected vessels of not less than 1,000 gross tons or tug and tow of not less than 1,600 combined gross tons while holding at least a United States Coast Guard license as master of steam or motor vessels of not more than 1,600 gross tons; OR
- (3)** two years of service as a chief officer on ocean or coastwise vessels of not less than 1,600 gross tons while holding a United States Coast Guard license as master of ocean steam or motor vessels of any gross tons.
- (4)** two years of service as commanding officer of United States commissioned vessels of not less than 1,600 gross tons and hold a United States Coast Guard license as master of ocean steam or motor vessels of any gross tons;

(5) three years of experience as a member of a professional pilot's organization, during which the person actively engaged in piloting while holding at least a United States Coast Guard license as a master of steam or motor vessels of not more than 1,600 gross tons

The Deputy Trainee program typically takes 2-3 years to complete, depending on availability for training and if the Trainee has any previously endorsed Federal Pilotage.

The Apprentice Trainee Program is for anyone who passes the entrance exams but does not have the above listed sea service experience to qualify as a Deputy Trainee. By state law, the Apprenticeship Training Program is a 4-year training program that can be shortened to 3 years, provided the Apprentice Trainee successfully completes 125% of the required maneuvers.

How frequently does SEAPA accept candidates who have passed the exam, made the cut score, and made the list?

There is no schedule of how quickly SEAPA will accept candidates that have made the list. It all depends on the staffing needs of the group, which are related to vessel traffic and current pilot membership numbers.

Does the training program vary in length?

Yes. As explained above, there are two separate paths in the Training Program, depending on the experience of the Trainee. Typically, Deputies take 2 to 3 years to complete the training program, of which most of the training occurs in the summer. However, Apprentice Trainees are required to be in the Training Program for a minimum of 3 calendar years (with completion of 125% of the required maneuvers).

What are the expectations of shiphandling skills for a new trainee to have prior to entering the program?

We believe that successful candidates who have met the threshold minimums for our exam will bring the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in our Pilot Training Program.

Do pilots typically come from one segment of the industry over another - towing versus shipping versus ferries?

Successful candidates have come from all segments of the industry and SEAPA values that diversity of experience.

I was told the Training Program is unpaid. Are there any reimbursements during training? Can you continue to work and train at the same time?

The SEAPA training program is unfunded. There is no stipend, nor are any expenses incurred during the training program reimbursed. (For comparison, Puget Sound has a stipend, but trainees are obligated to train a certain amount of time in the calendar year to get that stipend.) SEAPA has trainees who still sail while training half or one-third time. The only requirement is that a Trainee must participate in training at least once per quarter. It is also important to note that once a Trainee becomes a licensed pilot, there is no "buy In" for our association.

I am currently a 3rd mate with unlimited tonnage license, but I will be testing for my 2nd Mate license and my 1600 ton Master license later in the year. I do not hold any federal pilotage. Can I apply?

Not yet. For the SE Alaska Pilots' Association entrance exam, an applicant must hold a minimum 1600GT Master's license prior to the application deadline (to be published on the SEAPA website).

With regards to Federal Pilotage, all applicants who hold a 1600 ton Master and do not have an unlimited tonnage license, must show that they can receive unlimited Federal Pilotage endorsements from the USCG Juneau Regional Exam Center. It takes most Trainees that enter the program without Federal Pilotage about 1-2 years to get all of the trips done and charts drawn, but Trainees may do that concurrently while in the State Pilot training program. Applicants do NOT need to have any Alaska Federal Pilotage to apply or get accepted into the training program.

I know that I won't qualify for the piloting program or testing this time, but I would like to know the best way to be prepared for next time.

Please see the separately published SEAPA Exam FAQs document.

How does it work if I am accepted into the program?

Once an applicant successfully passes the examination process and is placed on the list of accepted candidates, they will be notified as to their placement on the list. Depending on their ranking, they will either be invited immediately to enter the Training Program, or will need to wait for an official invitation to start training. How long that wait is depends on where the trainee is on the list.

Once a trainee begins the Training Program, their progression depends initially on whether or not they have any previously endorsed Federal Pilotage in SE Alaska. If the trainee does not have any Federal Pilotage, they can expect to spend quite a bit of time on cruise, cargo and ferry vessels getting their Federal pilotage trips as an Observer. After the trainee gets some local Federal Pilotage endorsements on their MMC, they can take the State Core exam, which is similar to the SEAPA entrance written exam, but with some added local regulations. After passing that exam, the Observer trainee will change status from Observer to Trainee and be eligible to train at the conn of both cruise and cargo ships. There are many required maneuvers and transits in this phase, and once all of the requirements are met the Trainee will be ready for their final assessments prior to licensure.

Will those not employed by Alaska Marine Highway System be required to obtain the pilotage for the ferry routes?

Trainees are required to obtain pilotage for all of Southeast Alaska, from Yakutat Bay to Dixon Entrance. This is in excess to the basic Ferry routes. Typically Trainees can get much of their pilotage on cruise ships however some of the routes are only available via observing on AMHS vessels. SEAPA Trainees may ride the ferries as a pilot observer for a fee.

Do all SEAPA trainees live in AK in the summer?

Not all SEAPA Trainees live in Alaska, but the bulk of the training program does occur during the summer. Many Trainees find shared housing with other Trainees, but ultimately, the way Trainees manage their lodging and schedule is up to the individual .

Any other recommendations or suggestions would be greatly appreciated.

Trainees need to be their own advocate. As there is no stipend, SEAPA does not “direct” a Trainee’s activities. Mentorship is provided, but the responsibility is completely on the Trainee to digest and accomplish the Training Program requirements.