AECO Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators

Membership Handbook



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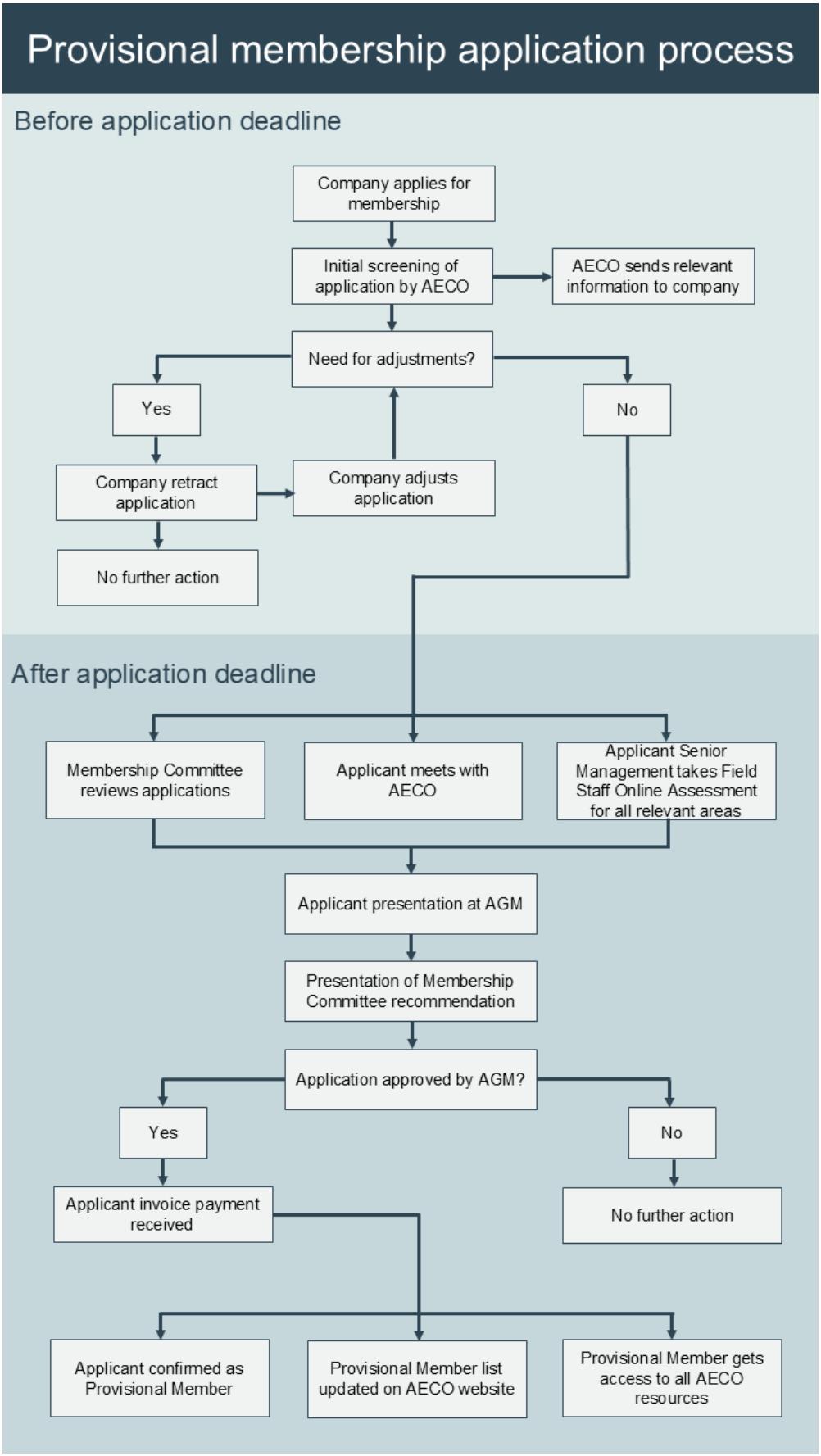
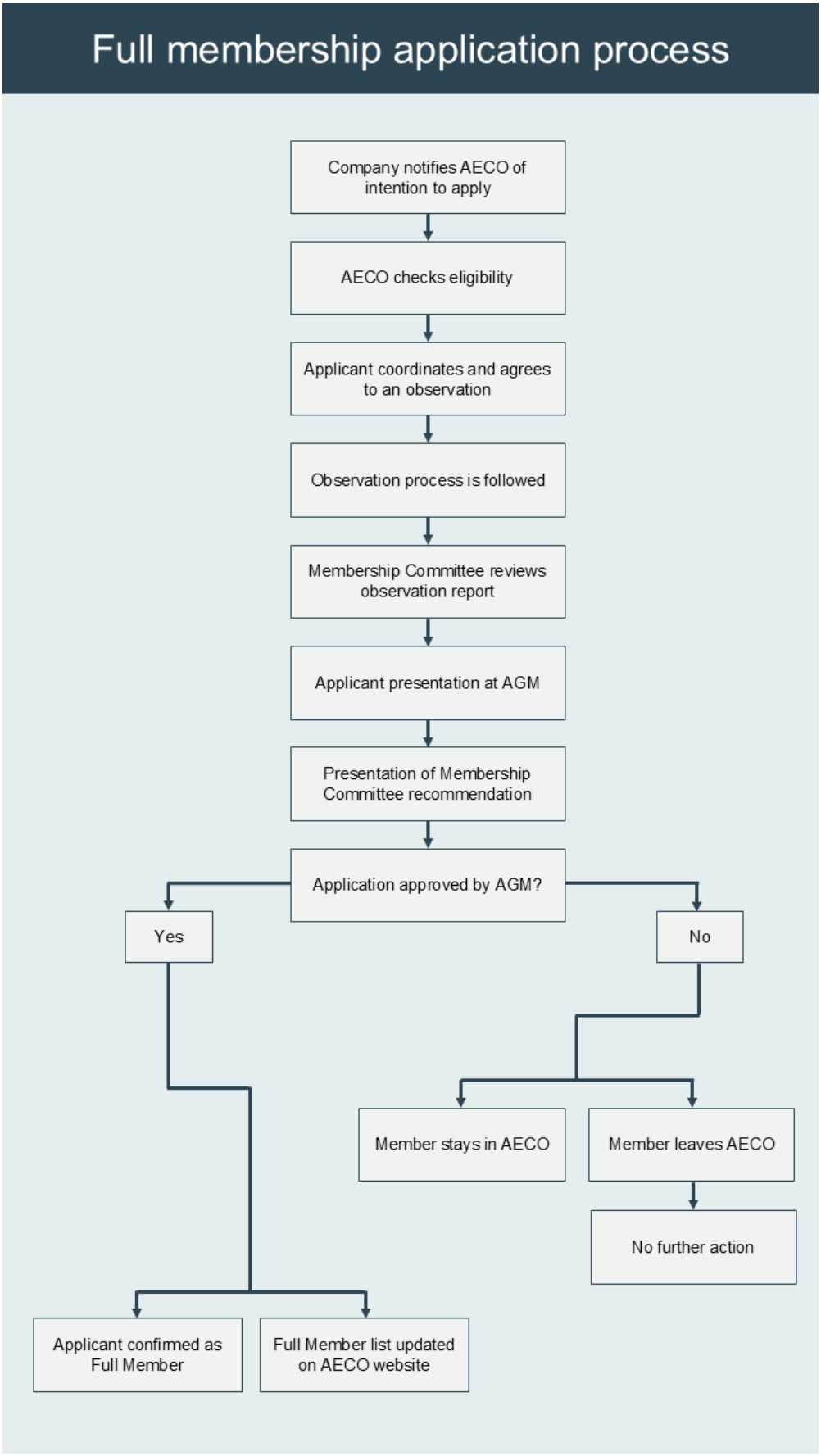
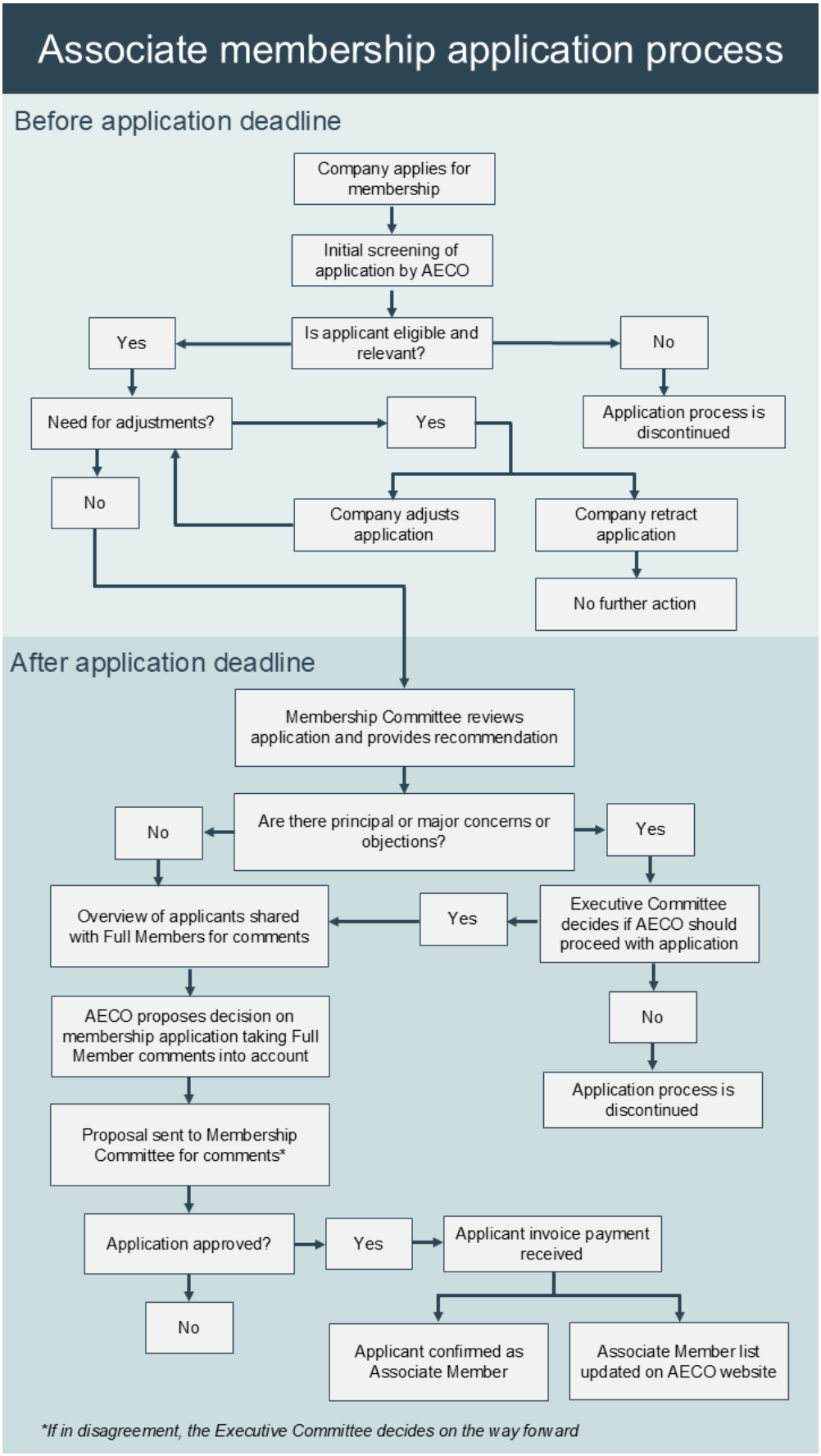
Becoming a member of AECO

The association welcomes applications from Arctic expedition cruise operators, expedition cruise vessel owners and managements, port agents, travel agencies and others connected to Arctic cruise operations that support the objectives of AECO and agree to follow AECO's guidelines.

Expedition cruise is characterized by a focus on responsible and sustainable tourism, flexible itineraries, high focus on the destination, ability to carry out operations and landings independent of local infrastructure, highly skilled staff and a strong focus on knowledge sharing and learning. Please also refer to AECO Bylaws Art. II, section A.


Provisional membership application process
Before application deadline
Company applies for membership
Initial screening of application by AECO
AECO sends relevant information to company
Need for adjustments?
Yes
No
Company retract application
Company adjusts application
No further action
After application deadline
Membership Committee reviews applications
Applicant meets with AECO
Applicant Senior Management takes Field Staff Online Assessment for all relevant areas
Applicant presentation at AGM
Presentation of Membership Committee recommendation
Application approved by AGM?
Yes
No
Applicant invoice payment received
No further action
Applicant confirmed as Provisional Member
Provisional Member list updated on AECO website
Provisional Member gets access to all AECO resources


Full membership application process
Company notifies AECO of intention to apply
AECO checks eligibility
Applicant coordinates and agrees to an observation
Observation process is followed
Membership Committee reviews observation report
Applicant presentation at AGM
Presentation of Membership Committee recommendation
Application approved by AGM?
Yes
No
Member stays in AECO
Member leaves AECO
No further action
Applicant confirmed as Full Member
Full Member list updated on AECO website


Associate membership application process
Before application deadline
Company applies for membership
Initial screening of application by AECO
Is applicant eligible and relevant?
Yes
No
Application process is discontinued
Need for adjustments?
Yes
No
Company adjusts application
Company retract application
No further action
After application deadline
Membership Committee reviews application and provides recommendation
Are there principal or major concerns or objections?
No
Yes
Overview of applicants shared with Full Members for comments
Yes
Executive Committee decides if AECO should proceed with application
AECO proposes decision on membership application taking Full Member comments into account
No
Application process is discontinued
Proposal sent to Membership Committee for comments*
Application approved?
Yes
Applicant invoice payment received
No
Applicant confirmed as Associate Member
Associate Member list updated on AECO website
*If in disagreement, the Executive Committee decides on the way forward

Responsibilities and requirements

The Full or Provisional Member that is responsible for itineraries within AECO's geographical areas, is also the responsible party to AECO as operating member and responsible for ensuring operational compliance with AECO Bylaws, standards, and guidelines (ref. AECO Bylaws, Art. III-K).

The Full or Provisional Member operating a vessel registered with AECO within the AECO geographical area, the member must adhere to all guidelines and obligations of the AECO Bylaws and requirements (ref. AECO Bylaws, Art. II-A, III-K).

An AECO member chartering a vessel from another AECO member, or a third party is responsible for implementing all requirements.

In addition, to comply with AECO Guidelines, relevant local laws and regulations, members are required by AECO Bylaws, Article III, sections E, F & L) to:

General

- Adhere to all AECO Bylaws, guidelines, standards, tools, and decisions.
- Ensure that ships owned or chartered by members are operated according to relevant maritime international laws and regulations.
- Contribute to the organization's good reputation and credibility by committing to a high standard, and to representing the Arctic expedition cruise industry in the best possible manner.
- Submit appropriate dues and fees to AECO according to set deadlines.
- Appoint an AECO contact person, who is responsible for relaying information to and from AECO to relevant departments within the member company.
    - The contact person is expected to be able to reply on behalf of the member company.
- Include AECO's logo and a link to AECO's website on their company's website.
    - Members are encouraged to actively spread information about AECO when relevant.

- Never share contacts, contact lists or information of other members obtained through membership with third parties.
- Never use contact lists or information obtained through membership for use for own marketing, promotion or sales purposes.

Supporting AECO

All members are expected to contribute to the organization’s good reputation and credibility. Members do this by:

- Advocating for the association and its work.
- Pointing to the association and its work when relevant.
- Emphasizing the importance of the Association within own company and to external partners.
- Promoting membership to operators that are non-members.
- Setting a good example for the industry and local partners by implementing AECO's guidelines, measures, and tools.
- Share best practices and learnings with AECO and its members.

AECO membership is an active membership

Members of AECO actively:

- Volunteer for participation in committees and working groups and accept positions of trust.
- Engage and contribute to projects, member surveys and consultation processes.
- Reply to AECO’s inquiries in a timely manner within set deadlines.
- Participate in AECO conferences and meetings.
- Share important and relevant information and news with the AECO secretariat.

Mandatory requirements and recommendations for members

Mandatory requirements	
Implement AECO guidelines	AECO guidelines are mandatory for operations within AECO's geographical area.
Field Staff Online Assessment	AECO members must ensure that all expedition staff pass AECO's Field Staff Online Assessment every season for operations within AECO's operational area.
Mariners Online Assessment	AECO members must ensure that all relevant crew pass the AECO's Mariners Online Assessment every season for operations within AECO's operational area.
AECO Cruise Database & Live Scheduler	All operating members must: • Register trips for reporting sailing plans and berths for sale within decided deadline. • Vessels carrying more than 12 passengers: Register sailing plans/book sites before season. • Vessels carrying 12 or less passengers: Register sailing plans/book sites before an activity takes place. • Register post-visit-report (PVR) within decided deadline. • Complete annual reporting of environmental efforts, emissions data, and community engagement efforts. • Register and update operator information annually. • Register and update vessel information annually. • Submit information annually on participation in environmental projects.
AECO Vessel tracker and AIS	Operating members with vessels carrying 12 or more passengers must: • Install a vessel tracker. • Run AECO's vessel tracking while operating in the Arctic.
Report incidents	AECO members must report incidents involving one or more AECO members to AECO without delay to allow AECO time to assess and prepare response. Incidents should be reported using AECO's Incident Reporting Form.
Participate in AECO's Observer Scheme	Operating members are required to carry an AECO observer once every five years as described in AECO's Observer Scheme.

Community visits	AECO members must ensure that local communities are timely informed of the visit and of changes to the schedule, allowing sufficient time to prepare locally.
Fuel	Operating members are obliged not to use or carry heavy fuel (HFO) while operating in the Arctic.

Recommendations	
Off-Vessel Risk Assessment Tool	Operating members are recommended to use the Off-Vessel Risk Assessment Tool (O-VRAT) when planning and conducting nature landings in AECO's geographical area.
Research and citizen science	AECO members are encouraged to support and engage in relevant citizen science and research activities.
Near-miss reporting	AECO members are encouraged to report near-miss situations for learning and prevention purposes. AECO's Incident Reporting Form should be used.
Wildlife observations	AECO members are encouraged to engage with national and international programs by reporting sightings of wildlife species, such as whales, walrus ashore, certain birds, etc. in cooperation with national and international authorities and research institutions.
Community visits	Members are encouraged to contribute with value to the local community by local purchases, use of local guides, services a.s.o.
OLEX crowd sourcing	AECO members are encouraged to participate in AECO's crowd sourcing of depth soundings through OLEX.
AECO Clean Up Campaigns	AECO members are encouraged to participate in AECO sponsored Clean Up campaigns. Members are requested to report clean ups to AECO.

Important deadlines

Applications for membership	
June 1	Application deadline for provisional membership
January 1 and July 1	Application deadlines for associate membership
AECO Cruise database, Cruise Scheduler and Post Visit Reports (PVR)	
Before season start/during season	Update vessel and company information in the AECO Cruise Database.
Before season start/during season	Register mariners and field staff for mandatory Online Assessment.
Scheduler opening/Derby Day	Opening of Cruise Database and Live Scheduler site bookings on second Wednesday in January at 13.00 UTC.
Post voyage	Post Visit Reports (PVR) must be submitted within 14 days of trip completion. Number of passengers from PVRs automatically used for completing reporting for AECO fees and dues.
Post season	Complete annual reporting of environmental efforts, emissions data, and local value creation before 31 December.
Fees and Dues: Reporting to AECO	
May 1	Trip registration and berths for sale reporting for next operational year.
September 1	Estimated passenger number/load factor for next operational year. Report in Cruise Database and Live Scheduler > Berths for Sale.
Fees and Dues: Payments	
November 1	Deadline for payment of membership dues. Based on reported berths for sale.
February 1	Deadline for payment of Per Pax Fees (75%). Based on estimated passenger numbers.
December 31	Final settlement based on actual passenger numbers. Final pax number from reported PVRs.

Incident reporting and non-compliance

Incident reporting is important to AECO and all members, as it allows AECO to prepare support to members, to follow up on learnings from incidents, and to collect statistics and trends to inform needs for changes to guidelines and standards. AECO encourages members to also share incidents where members have assisted others.

- All members are required to report major incidents to AECO without delay.
- Non-compliance with AECO guidelines must be reported to AECO without delay.
- All members must report incidents during operations in the AECO Operational Area to AECO using the Incident Report Template (ref. AECO Bylaws, Art. III, section K).
- It is the operating member who is responsible for ensuring compliance and for reporting incidents and non-compliance to AECO (ref. AECO Bylaws, Art. III, section J-K)

AECOs primary role and responsibility is to have an overview of the situation, assess the risks to the industry and the association, and to respond.

AECO's response incudes assisting the member(s) involved, assist SAR entities involved, inform Executive Committee, members, and stakeholders and to respond to media and relevant authorities.

Voting and nomination rights

Full Members of AECO have voting rights.

Depending on membership category members may nominate candidates to AECO committees and working groups. Full Members can also nominate members to standing committees and groups elected at the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

ORGANIZATIONAL RIGHTS				
	Voting rights	**EC election**	**Other committees**	**Working groups**
Full members	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Provisional members	No	No	Can be invited, without voting rights	Yes
Associate Members	No	No	Can be invited, without voting rights	Yes
Members on probation	No	No	No	No

Access and benefits

Meetings and events

Over the year, AECO organizes or co-hosts various events and information meetings. Most notable is the Annual Conference and General Meeting. Depending on membership category, status, and relevance, AECO members have access to events and meetings as shown below.

ACCESS TO MEETINGS AND EVENTS						
	AGM* Participation	**AGM* Speaking rights**	**Cruise Conference* Participation**	**Meet the destinations* participation**	**Joint Arctic SAR**	**Virtual, topic specific**
Full members	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Provisional members	Yes	Can be invited	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Associate Members	Yes	Can be invited	Yes	Yes	Can be invited	Can be invited
Members on probation	Invitation only	No	No	No	No	May be restricted

**Part of the Arctic Cruise Week event*

Tools and resources

Members of AECO have access to different tools and resources depending on the membership category and status.

ACCESS TO TOOLS AND RESOURCES				
	Members- only website	**Cruise database**	**Online Assessment**	**O-VRAT**
Full Members	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Provisional Members	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Associate Members	Yes	Only ship management companies and vessel owners	On request – individual consideration	No
Members on probation	May be restricted	May be restricted	May be restricted	May be restricted

Communication and information

Members of AECO in good standing can use AECO's logo in their own material (see Bylaws Art. III, Section L for more information) under some conditions. Members will also receive relevant updates from the AECO secretariat.

AECO COMMUNICATION				
	Use of logo	**Listed on AECO's website**	**Updates from AECO**	**AECO Newsletter**
Full members	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Provisional members	Yes – with specific text, see Bylaws**	Yes	Yes, unless only for Full Members	Yes
Associate Members	Yes - with specific text, see Bylaws**	Yes	No	Yes
Members on probation	No***	No	May be restricted	May be restricted

** *Article III, section L.*

****Article III, section B.4*

Involvement and response

AECO’s organization structure depends on involvement of the members.

Committees and groups

The members hold an invaluable competence and experience that AECO is dependent on in the organization’s work. Through committees, working groups and resource groups, members can contribute to and influence the work of AECO. All members must be prepared to accept positions of trust if asked and/or voted in.

AECO’s Terms of reference for standing committees, working groups and resource groups, gives further information regarding nomination, elections, mandates, and roles.

Response

When signing the application for membership, members of AECO also sign on to be responsive to correspondence and inquiries from AECO.

AECO’s work processes often include asking the members for input, opinions, and votes. AECO also issues surveys and sometimes works with partners to research information that can inform work on behalf of the members. To ensure the best possible bases for the organization’s work, and to work efficiently, it is important that members respond to inquiries from AECO in a timely manner.

Provisional Membership Time Limitation

Provisional Membership is granted for a two-year period. From the AGM where an applicant is approved as a Provisional Member, the member has two operational years to complete an observation and apply for Full membership. At the third AGM after approval of the Provisional Membership Full membership must be applied for. If there are compelling reasons why this is not possible, the Provisional Member may apply for an additional year as Provisional Member before applying for Full Membership.

If the Provisional Member is granted a one-year extension but fails to apply for Full Membership at the fourth AGM after the original approval of the membership, the membership is terminated.

Non-compliance and termination of membership

Incident reporting goes to the Secretariat. The Secretariat gathers available information and informs the Executive Committee of incidents requiring further follow-up.

Non-compliance and disputes may be put forward by the Executive Committee (EC) or AGM to the Compliance and Dispute Resolution Committee (CDRC) for investigation.

The CDRC recommends actions to the EC, including potential learnings from the incident.

Based on the CDRC recommendation, the EC decides if an incident should be brought to the AGM for a decision on potential change of status for involved members.

Member not in good standing	
Full or Provisional Members	May be put on probation if: 1) The member does not meet the requirements dictated in the AECO Bylaws, i.e., non-compliance. 2) The member has not paid dues or fees in a timely manner. The maximum probation period depends on the reason for the probation. If due to unpaid dues or fees, the membership is automatically terminated after a maximum of 1 year of probation. *(ref. Bylaws Art. III, Section B.4 and K)*
Associate Members	Not relevant.

Termination of membership	
Full and Provisional Members	Members who wish to end their membership of AECO must do so in writing before September 1, the prior year. *(ref. AECO Bylaws Art. III, Section G)* If a member company is purchased and ceases to exist as a company, the membership is terminated. *(ref. AECO Bylaws Art III, Section I)* If a member has unpaid membership fees for more than a year without an agreed payment plan, the membership automatically ends. *(ref. AECO Bylaws Article III, Section B and Art VIII, Section C)* If a member has been on probation for a year, the AGM will vote on a recommendation from the EC and may decide to terminate the membership. *(Ref. AECO Bylaws Article III, Section B.4)* At the third AGM after becoming a Provisional Member, the Operator must either apply for Full Membership or apply for one additional year as a Provisional Member. If the Provisional Member does not apply for Full Membership at the fourth AECO AGM, the membership is terminated. *(Ref. AECO Bylaws Article III, Section B.2)*
Associate Members	Associate membership may be terminated for any or no reason by AECO's Executive Committee based on presentation of the case from the Secretariat or members of AECO. If the Bylaws requirements are not met or dues not paid, the membership will be terminated.

Appendix: Abbreviations

A list of common AECO abbreviations:

AECO = Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators

AGM = AECO's Annual General Meeting

CDRC = Compliance and Dispute Resolution Committee

EC = Executive Committee

FSOA = Field Staff Online Assessment

O-VRAT = Off-Vessel Risk Assessment Tool

PVR = Post-Visit Report

SAR = Search and Rescue

SEC = AECO's Secretariat

TTX = Tabletop Exercise