

IMBA RIDE CENTER APPLICATION GUIDE

What is an IMBA Ride Center?

The Ride Center™ designation represents IMBA's Model Trail recognition for large-scale mountain bike facilities that offer something for every rider. Bring your full arsenal of bikes to these destination-worthy areas. From backcountry adventures to shuttle-served gravity trails, and from expert-only to family-friendly, you'll encounter the best the sport has to offer. Ride Centers range from renowned Gold Level destinations like Park City and Oakridge to smaller towns that totally revolve around the ride like McCall or Marquette.

IMBA Ride Centers will be designed for every type of mountain biker, provide a positive mountain bike experience with progressive skill building, and include facilities that break down the barriers for entry with bike rentals, quality maps, clear signage, and available instruction or guiding. These model trail systems will broaden the demographic of the mountain bike community by providing a model beginner experience that is family friendly on the same site that will challenge an expert rider. A Ride Center will demonstrate the best practices in mountain bike trail design and construction for grassroots replication.

Ride Centers will also bring major economic benefits to their host communities. IMBA has compiled online resources that describe the ways that mountain biking supports tourism and enhances economic development in communities around the globe.

What are the core components of the Ride Center Designation?

This designation is designed to support local stakeholders and land managers in their effort to create the ultimate mountain biking destination. This designation is just as much about the process as the award itself. The application criteria serves as the blueprint for improving a trail system and is comprised of multiple factors with both trail experience and surrounding community amenities being measured.

The designation and rating (and potential delisting or demotion) of a Ride Center shall be based on clear criteria. These criteria do not need to be objective, and some will necessarily be subjective, but in all cases they will relate to providing great riding opportunities.

The Ride Center application process consists of:

- a self evaluation;
- in person professional assessment and review
- a report detailing the findings;
- and a thorough evaluation of the existing conditions, opportunities for growth, and recommendations on next steps to improving the trail system status.

Whether you are confident you will score well in the process or highly motivated to develop a road map, this process will provide great benefit to your mountain bike community and beyond.

The evaluation criteria is comprised of key aspects that make an amazing mountain bike destination and include, but not limited to;

1. Trail Experiences
2. Services
3. Community Involvement

4. Tourism, Promotion, and Marketing
5. Evaluation and Measurement

Geographic Area: A Ride Center's geographic area shall be all the facilities within a 30-minute drive time radius (as determined by Google Maps) from a determined center point. The legal trail and bicycling opportunities that start within this area are considered the trail system that is being evaluated in the application. *Regional Ride Centers* can be created by agglomerating several Ride Centers that exist within a two-hour drive time radius, but the individual Ride Centers cannot have overlapping territories and must stand alone on their own merits.

Self Evaluation: The first step in the process is for interested applicants to review all materials and perform a self evaluation following the scoring matrix and criteria. This process entails interested applicants self assessing their community's trails based off the Ride Center criteria to determine if they are a potential candidate and want to take the next step. Instructions on how to facilitate a self evaluation are in a later section.

Professional Review and Assessment: Each applicant who decides to engage in the professional review process will be investing in a thorough assessment of the strengths, opportunities, constraints, and quality evaluation of the trails in the proposed Ride Center. The report will detail an evaluation of existing assets to support a better understanding of what each community has to complement enhanced future marketing and differentiate one Ride Center from another. Throughout the process an exposure of the potential weaknesses or room for improvement will allow community to focus on areas and issues that prevent them from attracting larger visitation, broader demographics, and identify what might limit a potential designation or upgrade.

Who benefits from an IMBA Ride Center?

IMBA Ride Centers have the ability to benefit multiple community stakeholders:

- The global mountain bike community
- The trails community
- The individual host communities at each IMBA Ride Center
- Surrounding urban/suburban residential communities

The Global Mountain Bike Community

The mountain bike community needs an upsurge in riding – to build critical mass. In the last decade, the mountain bike community has grown in numbers, strengthened its national political voice, built its grassroots capacity, maintained and gained access to thousands of miles of trails, been recognized as trail experts, and increased its global economic impact. In the next decade, the mountain bike community needs to broaden its demographic, to engage the next generation, to increase its political effectiveness on the local and statewide level, and to put model mountain bike trails on the ground for mass replication.

The maturation of the mountain bike community is dependent upon the numbers. Currently, one in five Americans (40 million) rides a mountain bike every year, but less than 20% of those riders get out for more than two rides each month. Increasing the accessibility to trails is the best solution to getting those 30 million riders out riding more often, and further increasing this number of riders will provide:

- Politically, a larger voice that will result in more open space preservation, greater trail access, and increased validation of the mountain bike community as part of the public process.
- On the ground, IMBA's grassroots chapters, supporting organizations, and partners will increase their capacity for local and regional community development, stewardship, and fundraising.

The Trails Community

Over the last 25 years IMBA has taught the trails community the basics of sustainable trails, best practices in mountain bike management, and built demonstration trails around the world. IMBA has published three highly acclaimed books on trail design, construction and management: “IMBA Trail Solutions, Mountain Bike Management, and Bike Park Book.”

The trails community needs comprehensive model trail systems that can be centers to teach sustainable trail building and management, to innovate and test new techniques, and to conduct needed trail research. IMBA Ride Centers will be model trails for all of the above, and the trails community will be actively engaged throughout the process.

Ride Center Host Communities

The world-class recreation trails and facilities offered at Ride Centers will stimulate local economies, heighten local quality of life, inspire natural resource conservation, and encourage active lifestyles. Ride Center host communities will become model trail communities – communities with a sustainable trails-based economy, healthy residents, and a high quality of living.

According to the USDA (2005 study), rural tourism and recreational development spikes employment growth rates, boosts earnings and income levels, lowers local poverty rates, and shepherds improvements in local educational attainment and health. The potential economic impact of IMBA Ride Centers is two-fold: tourism dollars and property values.

Mountain bikers will travel hundreds of miles for high quality trails. According to a 2003 study, 80% of mountain bikers surveyed reported taking at least one trip that year exclusively to mountain bike, and the average trip length as 4.6 days (Green, 2003). According to most recreation studies, recreation-based tourists typically spend at least \$25 a day. Mountain bike tourism has the potential to redefine the economies of Ride Center communities:

- Following the development of a Trails Plan for the area surrounding the small town of Oakridge, Oregon mountain bike tourism generated \$98.6 million in goods and services a year for the town in 2016.
- For a community of only 108 people Copper Harbor, Michigan, at the farthest tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula sees approximately 20,000 visitors a year to ride the trails in the area
- Bike trails in the Moab, Utah area, a long-time mountain bike destination, produce a consumer surplus value of between \$197 and \$205 per trip, and the annual value of the trails is between \$8.4 and \$8.7 million (Fix and Loomis, 1999).

The economic impact of trails reaches beyond bike shops, gear rentals, guided tours, coffee shops, local restaurants; trails are also the most desired amenity of prospective homeowners (National Association of Homebuilders). Property values were 6% higher for homes adjacent to greenways in Seattle, 25% higher for homes in Boulder that are within 4,000 feet of a greenway, and 61% of Minnesota residents noted a property value increase due to the presence of a nearby trail.

Additionally, there is a national movement that has tied childhood obesity, attention deficit disorder, impaired social skills and a culture of depression with less time outdoors, more time with electronic technology, and little free and unstructured time. The benefits of getting kids outside have been well documented – and “nature deficit disorder” can be directly tied to lack of access to safe and fun places to exercise and play outdoors (Children and Nature Network website).

Who should apply to become an IMBA Ride Center?

Interested applicants can be land managers, IMBA chapters or local mountain bike groups, tourism or

convention and visitor bureaus, and any stakeholder group in an area who desires to develop their community and trails system into a mountain bike destination. We highly recommend that applications are submitted by one organization or individual who is the lead on the project which is part of a larger community group or committee working collectively to elevate the areas status and work to engage all aspects of the surrounding region. It is also recommended that the land management agency is supportive of the community seeking the ride center designation.

Application Timeline

1. Application and updated process and criteria will be made available to interested applicants in the Spring of each year. An open house and Q&A will be held for interested applicants in the first week or two following the launch of the application for the current year.
2. IMBA will accept applications from June 1st to July 31st
3. Once applications are submitted each community will be assigned a project manager to review application and schedule on-site reviews which will happen between August and December
4. Following the professional review process a comprehensive report will be developed from January to March
5. After the completion of each review and report the Ride Center Review committee will assess all documents and reviews to make recommendation for the current year's Ride Center Class in March
6. Designation award Announcement will be made in April
7. Following year application process will open in March

Fees

Information on the program and the application criteria is available to anyone on imba.com. Should a community decide to participate in the program and work to receive a Ride Center designation there are fees associated with certain steps.

Application Fee: Following a self evaluation, if an applicant determines they are a candidate for a ride center designation or that they intend to utilize the process as a road map to help them further develop their trail network they can submit their application at <https://www.imba.com/model-trails/ride-centers> along with the application fee which will be \$250 and covers the administrative cost of review and set up.

Professional Review Fees: Each applicant will be set up with a project manager who will work with them through the professional review process. The review process, as detailed above, will include a multi-day professional assessment of all the trails in the system, surrounding amenities and trail management, tourism, and marketing best practices. The report and recommendations created will be extremely valuable in not only the Ride Center scoring and designation process but to help stakeholders evaluate next steps and continued improvement. Each review will be custom designed to the needs of

the applicant and the range of fees associated with that contract will be clearly defined in a proposal before any costs are incurred. The following cost estimates are a range for new designations at each level

Bronze: 3-5 days at \$800-1000 per day plus travel expenses and report generation

Silver: 5-7 days at \$800-1000 per day plus travel expenses and report generation

Gold: 6-8 days at \$800-1000 per day plus travel expenses and report generation

Renewals of current designations will be completed based off a submission of existing conditions remaining concurrent with trail options, quality, and best practices measured in previous application. A renewal at the same level, if the applicant still meets the qualifications, will be good for an additional 4 years. The renewal process and award fees are \$1000 due during the application and review period of the current years Ride Center application class. If a current designation lapses more than 24 months from initial award expiration they will be required to perform a full new designation review process.

Upgrades will be facilitated similar to new designation process with the time and trails evaluated being focused on the additional trail types and best practices the applicant is submitting for upgrade. An upgrade will require an in person review and the fees associated with that process will be developed with the applicant prior to any expenses being incurred.

Existing Ride Centers awarded their designation in 2014 or later will receive a 24 month extension to evaluate their current conditions based on the new criteria and develop steps necessary to achieve a designation under the new process and scoring.

Chapter Discount will be provided to ride center applicant communities that demonstrate strong engagement and connection with their local IMBA chapter.

Self Evaluation Instructions

Communities interested in becoming a designation IMBA Ride Center should first complete a self evaluation and assessment to determine their viability as a candidate. The following steps and instructions will help stakeholders better understand the process.

Step 1: Thoroughly review the entire Application Guide

Step 2: download either a printable pdf copy or the xls file of the evaluation criteria scoring matrix

Step 3: Thoroughly review all of the criteria and tabs in the scoring matrix

Step 3: Attend a Ride Center Open House to get a detailed review of the process and scoring from one of IMBA's professional consultants and Ride Center reviewers

Step 4: Assemble a small group of stakeholders who have intimate knowledge of trail system and trail design theory, construction, promotion, marketing, etc

Step 5: Gather all pertinent information and complete the self assessment

Step 6: If a formal review and designation is desired then applicant must submit self evaluation, application fee, and contact information <https://www.imba.com/model-trails/ride-centers>

Quality Trail Experience: Quality is difficult to define but easy to identify. For the purposes of the Ride Center Designation we will be basing the Quality Trail Experience measurement off of the [Bureau of Land Management's Guidelines for a Quality Trail Experience](#). In the context of mountain bike trails, excellence is realized when a trail design merges the desired outcomes and difficulty that a rider seeks with the setting which the outcomes are realized. Quality implies a sincere commitment to attaining the highest practical standard. This process allows the reviewer to add some subjectivity into the process and measure more than just whether or not you have an XYZ trail type. This QTE score will be counted

toward toward the overall score and has the potential to help or hinder a community's scoring based on the quality of the riding experience.

The Quality Trail Experience evaluation will be performed **only** by the professional reviewer during onsite evaluation and not to be included in the applicant self evaluation.

Ride Center Open House: interested applicants can attend an open house where professional reviewers and project managers will be available to walk participants through the self evaluation process and be available to answer any questions regarding the program. If you are interested in attending one of these open house please contact

Contact Info: have more questions about the Ride Center program? Contact modeltrails@imba.com