The health and safety of our participants and staff is one of our highest priorities. We also emphasize the educational quality of the experience for all participants in all programs. In order to achieve the intended outcomes, each member of each trek must be fully capable of and committed to engaging in activities, meeting physical and social challenges and tending to their personal needs as well as the collective needs of the group. Cottonwood Gulch values diversity, equity, and inclusion and strives to provide culturally responsive programming in a positive learning environment for all participants. Our instructors are skilled educators and facilitators who are prepared to teach necessary skills, but we do not specialize in experiences for people with disabilities or significant mental health, emotional, or behavioral conditions. Please read through the following list of Essential Eligibility Criteria (EEC). These requirements are not intended to be exclusionary, but to honestly identify the fundamental elements of participation – integrally tied to safety and risk management considerations as well as educational outcomes. If a participant does not meet the EEC, a determination will be made as to whether we can reasonably accommodate them without jeopardizing the health, safety, and positive learning environment for all students and staff members, while still adhering to the fundamental nature of the trek as planned. If you feel that your child may struggle with one or more of these criteria, please contact us so that we can work on developing supportive solutions, or suggest a trek that better fits their abilities.

**General EEC**

* Able to understand verbal and visual instructions individually and in a group setting
* Able to comprehend hazards/safety concerns when explained and to adhere to policies/procedures
* Able to effectively communicate to others personal distress, injury or need for assistance, and hazards/dangers
* Able to be outdoors for multiple days in all types of weather with a variety of stimuli including bugs, wind, temperature changes, wildlife, sunlight, and storms
* Able to remain alert for several hours at a time while traveling through remote terrain
* Able to stay properly hydrated and nourished, by day or night, and learn skills for self-care, including proper hygiene and use of clothing and equipment
* Able to learn skills and engage in tasks to support themselves and the group including those necessary for living in remote areas. This includes, but is not limited to: cooking, setting up and taking down camp, washing dishes, caring for group gear, packing backpacks and gear trucks, sleeping in a tent or tarp, and camp site clean-up
* Able to refrain from the use of all chemical substances unless prescribed, including alcohol and tobacco
* Able to be apart from electronic technology for the duration of the program
* Able to learn and practice Leave No Trace camping and travel techniques
* Able to work effectively as a member of a team. This includes taking personal responsibility for belongings and behavior, effectively communicating ideas and concerns on an individual and group level, accepting differences, and possessing a willingness to at times put the needs of the group before those of the individual
* Able to contribute to a safe social and learning environment and maintain appropriate relationships with other group members and instructors, refrain from sexual activity, harassment/bullying, and other disruptive behavior
* Able to tolerate being several hours or up to several days away from medical facilities
* Able to tolerate changes in diet, group living, long days filled with mentally and physically challenging activities, and a routine that is likely much different than your routine at home
* Able to meet all EEC whether or not directly supervised by an instructor
* Carry 10-25 pounds for day hikes on a variety of outdoor terrain
* Able to respectfully interact with people from potentially unfamiliar cultures

**Backpacking EEC**

* Meet all of the General EEC, listed above, in addition to those listed here
* Able to carry 30-60 pounds daily for backpacking for trips ranging from two days to one week
* Navigate a variety of uneven outdoor/wilderness terrain with travel distances ranging from 1-10 miles per day up to 14,500 feet in elevation
* Negotiate stream crossings with a group, where moving water and slippery or loose rocks are present

**Rock Climbing/Rappelling EEC**

* Meet all of the General EEC, listed above, in addition to those listed here
* Wear all required protective equipment, including a climbing harness (seat or full body) and climbing helmet.
* Communicate necessary climbing signals
* With an instructor, tie a series of knots and hitches and have the cognitive ability to apply them
* Independently maintain one’s position on a climbing wall to attempt ascending
* Maintain balance on uneven surfaces and keep an upright position independently
* Independently and reliably manipulate a climbing rope through a belay device such as an ATC or Gri-Gri
* Independently maintain a firm grip on a climbing rope for the time it takes a climber to ascend and descend

**Mountain Biking EEC**

* Meet all of the General EEC, listed above, in addition to those listed here
* Wear a properly fitted cycling helmet for the duration of the course
* Identify routes and hazards
* Independently mount, dismount, sit and balance on the bike for the duration of the course
* Travel and navigate independently on the bicycle over a variety of uneven, steep and challenging wilderness terrain, with travel distances ranging from 1 -10 miles per day, depending upon the program
* Able to to pedal, steer, slow down, and stop a mountain bike over uphill, downhill, bumpy, gravelly, loose, rooty, rocky, and flat terrain on natural and man made trails
* Able to keep an appropriate distance between yourself and other riders or trail users

**Service Project EEC**

* Meet all of the General EEC, listed above, in addition to those listed here
* Engage in service learning projects in indoor or outdoor (including backcountry) settings, such as trail or construction projects (including but not limited to: building, digging, lifting, painting, clean-up, and carrying weight) for 8 hours per day, independently or with the assistance of a companion
* Wear all required personal protective equipment for the duration of the project
* With instruction, ability to safely use hand or power tools

In the event that a trekker fails to meet the EEC to the extent that it is disruptive to the group while on trek, the family will be contacted to develop a plan that meets the social, mental, emotional and physical safety of the group and the trekker, which may include departing the trek early.