



## CAMP- it is a career

Few fields combine such a variety of backgrounds and disciplines as the camp field. Management roles in camps, outdoor education centers, or conference/retreat centers require some know-how and background in very technical fields such as human resources, nutrition and health care, food service, facility and business management; it also necessitates the blending of the principles of youth development and social group work, recreation, physical education, psychology, and education.

Camp careers provide the opportunity to integrate these disciplines by working with people in a stimulating outdoor setting. As ACA's mission confirms, working at camp gives you the opportunity "to enrich lives and change the world." While often referred to as summer camp work, today's camp careers are frequently year-round positions.

The description of a full-time position in the organized camp field is no longer simply "director of a children's summer camp." Today, organized camps encompass all ages — children, adults, senior citizens, families; all settings — day, resident, travel, trip, specialty, outdoor education, conferences; all year — every season of the year. Full-time positions found in the camp industry include:

- **Camp director** ordinarily refers to a person who is directly involved with the operation and management of a camp program and whose duties cover both administration and program.
- **Camp administrator** ordinarily refers to a person who administers more than one camp program and coordinates administrative functions, relying on support from the onsite director or program director. Director of outdoor programs or some variation may be used to specify the person who administers various programs in the outdoor field — day and/or resident camps, outdoor education, conferences and retreats, outdoor events, troop camps, etc.
- **Associate or assistant director** is the person who assists the administrator and is often responsible for an aspect of camp or for directing a specific program such as environmental education or the camp/conference center.
- **Trip leader** is the person who, under various titles, leads groups on expeditions, trips, and outdoor experiences, usually for extended periods.



- **Site and facilities manager** is the person who oversees the maintenance and upkeep of the campsite and facilities.
- **Food service director** has the responsibility to plan, direct, and supervise the camp's food service.

### **The Job**

The setting and circumstances of camp positions can range from the director and/or other camp staff who live on a resident campsite year-round, to the administrator, who operates out of a metropolitan office and only visits camps. Many positions at camp require a staff person to spend time in the following administrative functions other than program:

- recruiting/promoting
- budgeting, sometimes fund raising
- staffing: employing or recruiting volunteers, training, and supervising
- working with a policy-setting body
- coordinating functions
- meeting legal requirements
- writing and complying with ACA standards
- managing the administration of other program areas
- developing strategic plans

### **Qualifications**

Advanced degrees are helpful but not always essential. A B.A. or B.S. degree is usually required and is helpful in the areas of:

- recreation, with emphasis in camp
- youth development or group work
- liberal arts education
- outdoor education and/or camping

### **Camp Body of Knowledge:**

Participant Development & Behavior, Health & Wellness, Target Population & Diversity, Site & Facilities, Mission & Outcomes, Human Resources, Leadership, Program Design & Activities, Strategic Planning, Marketing, Food Service, Business & Finance, Transportation, and Risk Management.



## **Salary Information**

Annual salaries range from an average of \$15,000 to \$50,000, depending on the position held. Fringe benefits often include housing and meals during part or all of the year, depending on the operation of the camp. Many camps offer health insurance and retirement benefits. Private camps sometimes provide an opportunity to gradually buy into the business.

## **How to Prepare for a Career at Camp**

- Take available courses in the area of:
  - camp counseling
  - camp administration
  - outdoor education
  - adventure programming
  - business management
  - personnel management/human relations
  - community development
- Gain as much experience as possible by working in camps:
  - in different positions
  - under different sponsorships (private, agency, religious, etc.)
  - of different types (resident, day, etc.)
  - with different clienteles (boys, girls, coed, specialized needs, etc.)
- Attend and participate in camp-oriented meetings, workshops, seminars, and conferences. Such learning experiences are offered by colleges/universities, private enterprises, and various national and state associations including local ACA Sections.
- Do your field work or internship in a camp/outdoor education setting.
- Participate in American Camping Association professional development courses such as:
  - Basic Camp Director Course
  - Camp Director Institute
  - New Director Orientation Course
  - Online Day Camp Course