



Why Work at a Camp?

.....You love the outdoors. You love hiking and biking and so on. When you channel surf, Mountain Dew commercials really grab your attention. And -- your good friend says you're great with kids.

If you relate to this, then there's the perfect place waiting for you and needing you: summer camp. Over half a million college students will find their way from their campus to camp this coming summer to fill openings at approximately 8,500 camps across the United States. One problem though - there are more jobs to fill than there are people seeking them. So the American Camp Association, the group that sets the standards for the summer camp profession, is beginning its work now to connect interested college students to great summer jobs.

Now there's nothing's wrong with spending the summer behind a desk or a cash register, but consider this:

- live, play, and work in the great outdoors;
- go on active adventures;
- experience other parts of the country;
- make new friends from all over -- even from other countries;
- bank more money than you think -- with few expenses;
- become a child's hero.

All of this, plus you can put your education to work. Camp jobs offer invaluable skill-building, leadership, training, and enrichment opportunities found nowhere else. Regardless of your college major, camp experiences allow you to learn and develop skills that will enhance your job marketability. The benefits go far beyond a paycheck, too. Business executives often note that experience as a camp counselor translates into excellent management and personnel skills. College credit can sometimes be obtained from working at camp. Check with your college advisor to see if you qualify.

Camp jobs are everywhere and for everyone. No matter where you're from or what your ability level, if you love kids and enjoy the outdoors, you could fill a variety of camp jobs. And in most cases no experience is necessary.



- **Counselors** interact personally with campers and lead them through activities. At resident camps, counselors live with campers and at day camps they may travel with the campers on a bus to and from camp.
- **Program Staff** teach arts and crafts, archery, swimming, team and individual sports, horseback riding, boating, music, drama, dance, radio/TV, computers, rock climbing, nature studies, and more.
- **Lifeguards** work at the camp's swimming and boating areas. Consideration is given to students with proper certifications such as advanced lifesaving.
- **Other jobs** include food service directors and cooks, buildings and grounds, drivers, trip leaders, and office assistants.

Salaries for counselors or comparable positions generally range from \$1,000 to \$3,000 for the camp season and up to \$4,000 for persons who are certified in lifeguard training and other skilled positions. Room and board is provided at most camps.

But wait -- there's more. Experts agree that working at a summer camp packs powerful potential. "I'm impressed with how frequently and how much summer camp experiences have influenced young adults' lives," says Bruce Muchnick, Ed.D., a licensed psychologist who works extensively with day and resident camps. Summer camp is a special place where children and adults come together and form a unique community. In this setting, young adults working as counselors have the opportunity to:

- master real-life problem-solving skills;
- have a significant and positive influence in the lives of children;
- develop greater self-understanding;
- participate in experiences that enhance personal growth; and
- develop/expand a network of peer relations.

If you are considering a camp job, check to see if the camp is accredited by the American Camp Association. By definition, ACA-accredited camps comply with the association's [standards](#), and their owners and directors subscribe to ACA's code of ethics. As a result, ACA-accredited camps provide written employment agreements and personnel policies. An employment agreement should give the job description, salary, pay dates, benefits, and terms of employment. Personnel policies spell out how the camp handles time off, absence from work, performance evaluations, and requirements for health examinations.



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