

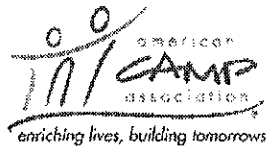
Seventh Edition

# **Basic Camp Management**

## **An Introduction to Camp Administration**

**Armand and Beverly Ball**

An American Camp Association Book



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# WHERE DOES THE PROGRAM BEGIN?



Camp Laurel South (Casco, ME)

## Chapter Three

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*In no other educational enterprise can the child have such continuous exposure to approved leadership, experience living closely with a small group of people where qualities of cooperation and consideration for others are the type of behavior that pays off, and be exposed to young adults who serve as models for the development of positive ideas and attitudes.'*

—Alice Van Krevelen

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After gaining a clear understanding of the requirements of his new job, a director's next step should be to learn as much about the current operation of the camp as possible, and, particularly, about the camp's philosophy, purpose, and outcomes. Though not necessarily recent or accurate, older camp literature may provide clues as to the expectations of the parents of previous campers and the intentions of previous administrators.

Vision, philosophy, purpose, mission, goals, objectives, outcomes, outputs, targets, indicators, and/or values are common terms used in camp organizations. Strategic or long-range planning adds another set of terms (including strategic goals, operational plan, checkpoints, benchmarks, action plans, etc.) that are or should be integrated with the first set. However, the definitions of these terms and their uses vary greatly, depending on the organization, trends in youth development, funding sources, and the like. The process of reaching consensus on mission and outcomes is more important than how they are defined. To help sort through these aspects, the following terms and definitions will be used in this book:

- *Vision*: A mental image of what the organization will look like in the future.
- *Philosophy/Values*: The critical examination of fundamental principles on which the camp desires to operate and an analysis of the basic concepts in the expression of those principles.
- *Mission/Purpose*: A statement of the essential reason for the existence of an organization and/or camp.
- *Outcomes*: The desired results or benefits that contribute to the achievement of the mission (sometimes called goals).
- *Indicators*: More precise statements that define the specific elements that achieve the accomplishment of the outcomes and broader mission of the camp (sometimes called objectives or targets).
- *Outputs*: The direct products of the camp's program activities, often expressed in numbers.
- *Evaluation*: The measure of success in reaching outcomes, used to adjust targets, goals, and outcomes for the remainder or next period of time. Indicators and outputs provide tools for that evaluation process.
- *Strategic planning*: A process to periodically evaluate the camp's philosophy and mission, and to design a comprehensive or long-range plan outlining outcomes for that future period of time.

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## Developing a Philosophy

A camp must determine for itself its core values. This determination is identified as the *philosophy* of a camp. *Webster's Dictionary* defines philosophy as "the critical examination of the grounds for fundamental beliefs and an analysis of the basic concepts in the expression of such beliefs."

By its nature, philosophy is theoretical and difficult to measure. Despite its abstract nature, the philosophy is the overall operational grounding of how one works with people in the camp setting. In the context of this book, the term philosophy is used to encompass the stated mission and outcomes of a camp. It is a question of the basic values that will always hold true, regardless of how the camp or conference/retreat center facility, program, or services may change. It is more than a physical setting. That philosophy should be determined by the camp's owners, if owned by an individual or group of individuals, and by the camp's board or governing committee, if owned by a corporation or by the public (government) entity operating the camp.

A camp director may have his/her own philosophy or values about working with people in a camp environment. This philosophy is likely to be evident in the leadership style, and is likely to evolve over a period of time. If a major philosophical difference arises between the camp director's philosophy and that of the owner/operator, it is a good idea to discuss it with the supervisor and, ultimately, with the operating committee/board. The owner/operator should not be expected to change the underlying philosophy or values with the arrival of each new camp director. Such changes should really come only after experiences in the operation or in the marketplace can be used to document a need for change. For a camp's philosophy to be meaningful in its operation, the philosophies of the camp owner and the camp director must be compatible and symbiotic.

## Mission

Before a new camp director can begin to program, a first step must be to find a way to put the basic philosophy and underlying reason for the existence of the organization or camp into definitive terms. The camp should have a general overriding purpose or mission statement that can be broken down into several specific outcomes that express how the mission will be accomplished.

If the camp is owned by a larger organization—such as a youth agency, school, or religious organization—the basic values and mission may be that of the organization and the camp is a way to accomplish the mission in a unique outdoor setting. The outcomes will be specific to the camp and describe the contribution the camp makes to the organization's mission. For example, the mission of Camp Fire USA is "to build caring, confident youth and future leaders."<sup>2</sup> The YMCA's mission is "to put Christian principles into practice

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through programs that build healthy spirit, mind, and body for all."<sup>3</sup> Their camps may provide a variety of programs that contribute to the achievement of the organization's mission. Some services the camp chooses to provide may not directly contribute to the mission. For example, rental services, in some cases, may only contribute financially and enable the camp to continue providing their primary services.

The basic philosophy or values of a camp rarely change. Most often, if a mission statement changes drastically, it is because the mission or purpose has been accomplished or the language needs to be changed to make it clearer to the current generation. However, the essence of a mission statement rarely changes. The changes most often take place in outcomes that are more responsive to current trends, emerging youth-development needs, and demographics. To simply change the program activities and staff of a camp without carefully tying the changes to the mission, outcomes, and indicators can lead to considerable confusion on the part of staff and families of campers.

The approval of the camp's mission and outcomes in organizational-type camps may involve a time-consuming process of working with boards and committees, but it is an essential part of that board's educational and ownership experience. Though the owner/director of an independent camp has greater latitude to change its philosophy and stated mission and outcomes more readily than organizational-type camps, no less careful thought should be given to developing such statements.

The new camp director may need to research a variety of sources to discover a camp's purpose or mission statement. If not found in the camp's brochure or on the camp's website, examination of other camp documents will be necessary. In some cases, the mission of the sponsoring organization becomes the mission of the camp. Perhaps an overriding purpose or some specific outcomes have been defined by previous directors. If these goals are not included in specific documents, they may be discovered in a number of different places:

- On the camp website
- In camp brochures
- In previous minutes, if the camp is operated by a board or committee
- In the articles of incorporation, if the camp is incorporated
- In conversation with a previous director or staff or with the executive of the organization or long-time board members
- In reports from previous summers
- In staff manuals

When the director has collected statements of purpose and various outcomes (whether verbal or written), it may be useful to write them out as clearly as possible and then to examine them carefully. The director should examine them for clarity, appropriateness to current community patterns and

attitudes, and for consistency with the operator's expectations. The director should examine these statements with a supervisor to see if that person interprets the purpose in a similar fashion. If possible, the director should also examine them with an operating committee or board, the executive committee, or another small, responsible group from the board.

With a clearly stated purpose as it was defined in the past and as it is now perceived by the operator (committee, board, or executive), the camp director should determine if any parts of the purpose are in conflict with his/her own personal philosophy. Regardless of such discrepancies, it is wise for the new camp director to operate under the stated purpose for at least one summer before making or suggesting any significant changes. Operation is a test of the validity and relevance of a camp's mission and outcomes. A director should never hesitate, however, to seek clarification of the meaning of purpose or outcomes.

## Statements of Purpose or Mission

The *purpose* or *mission* states the essential reason for the camp's existence and may not necessarily be easily measured. The purpose, along with its clarifying outcomes, brings the more intangible philosophy or values of the camp into more concrete terms. Some examples are shown in Figure 3-1.

*Camp A:* The principal purpose is to help young people of all backgrounds grow into responsible maturity in an outdoor setting through the application of Christian principles.

*Camp B:* The mission of the camp is to provide an outdoor setting for group living, where people can design programs to meet their group's needs and to provide a regular opportunity for youth to gain a deeper understanding of their relationships to their fellow man and their natural environment.

*Camp C:* The purpose of this camp is to help each individual camper gain skills that help him achieve a strong self-concept, self-responsibility, and an ability to get along with his peers.

*Camp D:* The [name of organization]'s mission is to provide quality developmental programs to help disadvantaged youth become productive adults and citizens.

Figure 3-1. Mission and purpose statements

The focus of each of the mission statements shown is quite different. Camps A, C, and D focus on the individual camper. Camp B focuses both on the facility and provision of program, (i.e., where a camp or conference center rents facilities as well as operates camp sessions). Camp A is directed more toward application of Christian principles and outdoor living; whereas Camps C and D focus on interpersonal and skill development. Camp D's mission is the same as that of the larger organization that owns the camp.

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If a camp serves a narrow age group or a specialized clientele, the developmental needs of that group should be considered in designing a mission statement. A camp may not be able to address all the developmental needs, but certainly many of them will be the foundation for the mission and outcomes. Refer to Chapter 4 for more details on human growth and development.

Peter Drucker states that "a mission statement has to be operational, otherwise it's just good intentions. A mission statement has to focus on what the institution really tries to do and then do it so that everybody in the organization can say: This is *my* contribution to the goal."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the statement should be simple, clear, and concise—something others can remember and to which they can relate. A starting point is to write a statement, cut it to 15 or 20 words, and then test it on others.

At this point, a director should pause and ask if this mission statement identifies the essence of the camp. What is the essential purpose of existence or identity of the camp? Does one word or one phrase clearly identify what the camp is about? For the moment, you must shed the multiple words that identify the good things the camp wishes to accomplish in the lives of people and focus on the camp's clear identity. For one camp, it may be "wilderness adventure," another might be "fun outdoors," another "personal growth," and another "aquatic skills."

Next, go back and evaluate that essence phrase with the mission statement. Are the two compatible? For example, Camp B's mission is lengthy and includes multiple phrases actually identifying two elements of its mission (serving groups and individuals) that are actually outcomes rather than a description of the essential qualities. A clearer statement might be: "The mission of the camp is to provide an outdoor setting for a quality experience in group living."

## **Desired Outcomes**

*Outcomes* are the desired change. The dictionary defines an outcome as "the result or consequence" of an action. In other words, outcome statements are an effort to define the result you wish to achieve in a given period of time. Some organizations identify desired outcomes when they undertake strategic planning. Through that planning process, determine the length of time for the plan (usually five years or less), and then develop specific action plans. Some desired outcomes take more than one planning period to achieve, and are therefore renewed or continued. Others are specific to one outcome, and still others contribute to more than one.

In a youth-development context, outcome statements outline the desired benefits for the participants during and after the experience. Outcome statements may be developed for a variety of purposes:

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- *Operation*: These outcomes could deal with administrative areas such as completing facility construction, improving quality of food, lowering food costs, balancing the budget, and utilizing technology. These outcomes are primarily measured in quantities, deadlines, and quality.
  - *Hospitality*: These outcomes come into play when a camp rents its facilities to other groups and becomes the host. They might deal with providing resources for the groups, developing facilities specifically for such groups, adding services, and such.
  - *Training*: These outcomes would be developed in the pre-camp staff-training week, ongoing in-service training, and, in cases where there is a year-round staff, for each person annually. Online training will also be an option in some cases.
  - *Personnel performance*: These statements would be developed by a staff person in conjunction with the individual's supervisor for a given time period and relate to the successful performance of job functions.
  - *Programmatic and/or youth development*: These outcomes are the desired benefits to the participant during or after the experience at camp, and they are measurable attainments for the participant.

The camp director will find it important to examine each of these elements and determine how and when outcomes are to be developed, what the specific indicators will be, and how they will be evaluated. Looking back to the mission, camps (like most human service organizations) are in business to provide programs and services to people. Therefore, outcomes must ultimately help to accomplish such benefits rather than compete with them. For example, if an operational outcome is a new building, the need should be based on how the design and use contributes to the accomplishment of the outcome or benefits the participants. Is it the best use of resources to accomplish the mission and achieve desired participant outcomes? Training outcomes should include knowledge of and achievement of participant outcomes and personnel performance outcomes evaluated on the success of the staff in helping participants benefit from the program.

For the purpose of illustration, and because participant outcomes are so important to the mission, discussion should focus on the development of camp programs and/or youth development outcomes. Some examples of youth development outcomes relating to each of the previous mission statements are shown in Figure 3-2.

## Indicators

Indicators are more precise than mission statements or outcomes. They more clearly define specific processes or actions that will accomplish the outcomes in a given time period. Indicators should be realistic and achievable. Examples of indicators relating to the mission and desired youth development outcomes are shown in Figure 3-3.

*Camp A:* The principal purpose is to help young people of all backgrounds to grow into responsible maturity in an outdoor setting through the application of Christian principles.

- Outcome #1: Increased interpersonal and social skills
- Outcome #2: Increased knowledge of man's impact on the natural environment
- Outcome #3: Increased ability to apply Christian principles to daily life experiences

*Camp B:* The mission of the camp is to provide an outdoor setting for a quality experience in group living. The camp shall provide appropriate facilities and equipment for rental groups:

- Outcome #1: To accommodate small living groups
- Outcome #2: To utilize the natural environment for appreciation and education
- Outcome #3: To teach certain outdoor skills

*Camp C:* The purpose of this camp is to help each individual camper gain skills that help him achieve a strong self-concept, become responsible, and get along well with his peers.

- Outcome #1: Improvement in skill level
- Outcome #2: Increased social skills
- Outcome #3: Increased self-reliance

*Camp D:* The [organization's] mission is to provide quality developmental programs to help disadvantaged youth become productive adults and citizens.

- Outcome #1: Demonstrated progression in knowledge and personal skills
- Outcome #2: Increased interpersonal skills
- Outcome #3: Increased sense of belonging

Figure 3-2. Youth development outcomes

Some of the preceding indicator statements further define the stated purpose and directions for a given period of time, but others leave room to define the specifics in measurable statements in the future. As you review the outcomes, you will note:

- An indicator needs to be identified with pre- and post-targets to make it measurable.
- The focus of an indicator should be on the change that will occur or benefit to the participants, regardless of the program or service.
- Each outcome relates to the overall mission and philosophy of the camp and to time-sensitive indicators.
- Some indicators help accomplish more than one outcome.

*Camp A:* The principal purpose is to help young people of all backgrounds to grow into responsible maturity in an outdoor setting through the application of Christian principles.

- Outcome #1: Increased interpersonal and social skills
  - ✓Indicator: By the end of camp session, the camper will have participated in planning and performance of a cabin skit for a campfire.
- Outcome #2: Increased knowledge of man's impact on the natural environment
  - ✓Indicator: By the end of the camp session, the camper will have used at least one low-impact skill being taught in the environmental education program.
- Outcome #3: Increased ability to apply certain Christian principles to daily life experiences
  - ✓Indicator: A staff member has observed the camper applying at least one Christian principle discussed during camp.

*Camp B:* The mission of the camp is to provide an outdoor setting for a quality experience in small-group living. The camp shall provide facilities and equipment for rental groups:

- Outcome #1: To accommodate small living groups
  - ✓Indicator: Change living cabins to accommodate no more than six or seven camper beds.
- Outcome #2: To utilize the natural environment for appreciation and education
  - ✓Indicator: Provide a nature trail with a leader's guide.
- Outcome #3: To teach certain outdoor skills
  - ✓Indicator: Provide a new archery range.

*Camp C:* The purpose of this camp is to help each individual camper gain skills that help the camper achieve a strong self-concept, become responsible, and get along well with peers.

- Outcome #1: Improvement in a skill level
  - ✓Indicator: Progression in one skill area of the camper's choice before the end of camp will be documented.
- Outcome #2: Increased social skills
  - ✓Indicator: Two new friends made by the camper will be identified during the session.
- Outcome #3: Increased self-reliance
  - ✓Indicator: The camper shall be observed choosing an activity he/she wishes to undertake during a free-time period.

*Camp D:* The [organization]'s mission is to provide quality developmental programs to help disadvantaged youth become productive adults and citizens.

- Outcome #1: Progression in knowledge and skill
  - ✓Indicator: The camper shall demonstrate progression in one skill area of the camper's choice, which shall be documented before the end of camp.
- Outcome #2: Increased interpersonal skills
  - ✓Indicator: The camper shall be observed being able to identify alternatives to fighting when disagreeing by end of camp session.
- Outcome #3: Increased sense of belonging
  - ✓Indicator: The camper shall be observed having an increased ability to contribute to the living group and to the larger camp community by the end of camp session.

Figure 3-3. Outcomes indicators

Though any type of outcome will remain somewhat vague or idealized, they require measurable indicators with identified methods or action plans and evaluation tools for staff to be able to determine success.

## Evaluation

After detailing the mission, outcome, and indicator statements of a camp, you must have some process for evaluating or determining the degree of their success. Based on the evaluation of successful achievements, the camp can make adjustments to its operation and set new expectations in terms of outcomes. A variety of methods can be used to measure successful achievement, including camper, staff, and parent evaluations (written or verbal). Figure 3-4 shows a model often used to plan and evaluate participant outcomes.

| <p>This chart takes an outcome and its goal and projects the time frame for evaluation of achievement of the outcome/goal over a time period (three years). This time frame assumes it is unrealistic to expect to achieve the same outcome/goal with the entire camp community in the first year of setting such a goal.</p> <p><i>Mission:</i> The purpose of this camp is to help each individual camper gain skills that help the camper achieve a strong self-concept, self-responsibility, and an ability to get along with peers.</p> |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| Outcomes   | Resources Needed or Inputs   | Methods or Action  | Indicators   | Evaluation Method(s)                               |
| Improvement in skill level.<br>Three-year goal:<br>To provide progression in activities and instruction to assist campers in gaining specific skills.  | Program equipment appropriate to age and skill.<br>Staff trained in helping campers to improve skills.   | Provide activities where campers have time to progress and gain competency in specific skills.<br>Design a system for recognition camper's progress.   | 85% of the campers progress at least one skill level in two of the three activities during the session.                            | Pre- and post- skill tests.<br>Parent evaluations. |
| Increase social skills.<br>Three-year goal:<br>To provide new opportunities within the program for the development of interpersonal relationships and social skills.   | Staff trained in group development and conflict resolution.<br>Equipment for four different team sports. | Design a team sports program where campers can participate on two or more different teams.<br>Assign members to teams rather than use cabin groupings. | 80% of the campers demonstrate an increase in respect for others.<br>75% have friends outside their cabin group by end of session. | Staff observation<br><br>Camper evaluation         |

Figure 3-4. Evaluation models

In terms of training and measuring staff progress, it is helpful to align specific methods to accomplish the outcome. When the staff understands the desired youth development outcomes and the changes they should be able to see, they can be much more intentional in their work with the campers and are more likely to be successful.

A checklist for each activity can be developed as an evaluation tool that can be marked for each individual—both at the beginning and end of the camp session. This tool can provide a checkpoint for any report to parents and for evaluating the achievement of the camp's outcomes and indicators for participant outcomes at the end of the season.

At that point, the director and staff can then use the degree of success in reaching these measures to determine adjustments or alterations, if necessary, to the outcomes and indicators for the future. Once the process is in place, it becomes relatively easy to make adjustments in the indicators and methods from year to year.

The American Camp Association's website ([www.ACAcamps.org/research](http://www.ACAcamps.org/research)) has additional information on both past and current research that includes youth development outcome research. Of particular note is the study conducted under the auspices of the American Camp Association on "Youth Development Outcomes of the Camp Experience,"<sup>5</sup> and the accompanying staff-training volume *Creating Positive Youth Outcomes*.<sup>6</sup>

Other methods for evaluation are discussed in Chapter 16. Some of these methods are measuring aspects other than the developmental outcomes of a successful camp and include such operational outcomes (sometimes called outputs) as participants served, budget met, facility vacancies, and the like.

## Checkpoints

- Is there a written statement of the camp's mission?
- Has the camp developed written outcome statements and goals specific to the camp?
- Has the camp administration tested the purpose, outcomes, and goals with the operator (supervisor, committee, or board)?

## Related Standards

*American Camp Association's Accreditation Standards for Camp Programs and Services:* PD-1 through PD-20; PA-1 through PA-36; PC-1 through PC-17; PH-1 through PH-7; PT-1 through PT-19

Foundational Practices: Program Design and Activities; Program—Horseback Riding; Program—Trip and Travel Regulations: Only those which may apply to the 501(c)(3) status with the Internal Revenue Service (tax-exempt status)

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## Endnotes

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