

BETTER TOGETHER

Building something new through collaboration



Photo courtesy of Word of Life Fellowship



You may be familiar with the improv principle, “Yes, and.” This is the idea in improvisation that when a scenario is put before you, you roll with it, embrace it and add to it. For example, in a scene where you’re playing a waiter and your scene partner says there’s a fly in her soup, you replying, “No, there isn’t,” immediately shuts down the scene. But running with that idea and replying, “Oh yes, I forgot to mention that’s part of today’s chef special!” changes the course of the dialogue and keeps things moving forward. ▶

When you collaborate ... the power for team development, ministry expansion and kingdom impact is immeasurable.

“Yes, and” means building on someone else’s idea rather than shutting it down. Collaboration involves adding something or someone to make an idea bigger, better, more effective, more efficient or have a greater impact. As one *Forbes* article put it, “Collaboration is a critical competitive advantage in today’s economy.” The same could be said for camping ministry.

When you collaborate across departments and teams within your ministry, with other camps in your section or build partnerships with outside organizations that are aligned missionally, the power for team development, ministry expansion and kingdom impact is immeasurable.

Collaboration Defined

Before digging into what collaboration looks like, it’s helpful to differentiate it from cooperation. Simply put, cooperation is about helping each other; collaboration is about building something together.

Steve Prudhomme, president of Grace Adventures (Mears, Michigan), puts it this way, “Cooperation is usually task-driven, involving individuals and groups who come alongside each other for a purpose or cause. Collaboration is an integrated partnership more tied into mission, purpose and outcome.”

He explains that cooperation involves minimal integration, with each side maintaining its identity. Collaboration, on the other hand, demands a higher level of interdependence. “If the why is aligned,” Prudhomme said, “the relationship is healthier.”

That sense of shared purpose is central for Javier Mendez, executive director of L.E.G.I.T. Ministries. “The greatest resources we have are people. In our calling to build God’s kingdom, people are not supposed to compete with each other but rather complete each other.” Collaboration is about people uniting around a shared mission, each bringing their strengths to build something greater than they could alone.

Collaboration as Culture

At Grace Adventures, Prudhomme sees collaboration as essential. But he emphasizes that it doesn’t happen by accident — it grows out of what he calls an “anticipatory culture.”

“We want people to see what we’re moving toward — a plan or destination,” he explained. “The rearview mirror is important, but the windshield helps our team look to the future and discover ways we can collaborate to get there.”

This forward-thinking mindset helps break down silo thinking. “We ask, how can we maximize strengths, minimize weaknesses and be all-in on the relationship?” Prudhomme said. “That way, when tough things happen, it’s us solving the problem — not pointing fingers.” ►



Photo courtesy of Barefoot Republic

“The more we can see other camps not as competitors, but instead part of our ‘circle of safety,’ the more we will trust one another and work together.” —Tiffany Staman, executive director of Calvin Crest (Oakhurst, California)

“The beauty of collaboration is found in the spirit of Christian community.”
—Ed Covert, executive director of The Salvation Army Redwood Glen and Conference Center (Scotts Valley, California)



Photo courtesy of Inspiration Point Christian Camp & Conference Center

Collaboration Across Departments

Effective collaboration within a ministry often starts by breaking down internal silos and encouraging different departments to work together toward shared goals. When teams move beyond their individual roles to co-create and support one another, new opportunities for creativity and impact emerge.

Mendez recalled a time when cross-departmental collaboration changed an entire team's approach to planning and programming. When someone responsible for the snacks at a day camp decided to tie the food into the theme in a unique way, the role of the kitchen team changed.

By making the snack theme related, Mendez said, suddenly everything was purposeful. The kitchen team thought about how their contribution could tie into and reinforce the message for the day. "Now the program people bring the kitchen team in to collaborate on how to integrate the food into the theme," he added.

At Tejas Camp and Retreat (Giddings, Texas), executive director Paul Biles has seen firsthand how collaboration can improve communication and workflow among the team. When a department needs extra help to get a task done quickly, other teams jump in. It was while helping the housekeeping team turn rooms that the sales team realized it was not realistically feasible to turn rooms in time when bookings were made back to back.

This moment sparked an ongoing conversation between the sales and housekeeping teams, leading to a collaborative effort to develop realistic turnaround windows and booking guidelines that serve both guest experience and staff well-being.

Collaboration Between Camps

As part of CCCA's Texas Section, Biles has found tremendous value in collaborating with other camps. Biles and two other nearby camps have taken advantage of their proximity by creating "serve days." Twice a year, all the staff from these camps gather at one of the properties to spend a morning working on service projects and enjoy lunch together.

Biles appreciates the opportunity for his staff to see other facilities and approaches to ministry, giving them a broader perspective and opening the door for networking opportunities with counterparts from different camps. "For new employees, the chance to make connections and build relationships with people in their same role at neighboring camps allows them to tap into experiences, perspectives and practices that may help them excel at their job," Biles shared.

These serve days reflect more than just cooperation — they're the fruit of a collaborative culture that values mutual support, connection and a shared vision for strengthening camp ministry across the region.

In the Sierra Pacific Section, Ed Covert, executive director of The Salvation Army Redwood Glen Camp and Conference Center (Scotts Valley, California), has seen the benefits of collaboration between camps. "We've had the interns from Mount Hermon over to tour them around, talk about our ministry focus and how we go about it," Covert shared. "Our approach is really different from Mount Hermon's, so we've also brought our gap year students over there to expose them to different ways of doing camp."

In exchange, Mitch McWilliams, assistant director at The Salvation Army Redwood Glen Camp and Conference Center, has provided teaching and soft-skill training for the staff at Mount Hermon, and the Mount Hermon team hosted Covert's staff to experience the camp's aerial adventure and the staff culture they've created.

At Calvin Crest (Oakhurst, California), executive director Tiffany Staman has seen firsthand the valuable connections made with other camps in their section. Staman pointed out that author Simon Sinek emphasizes that successful collaboration stems from shared values, mutual trust and a focus on collective success over individual gain — fostering a "circle of safety." She explained, "The more we can see other camps not as competitors, but instead part of our 'circle of safety,' the more we will trust one another and work together." ►

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Collaboration With Outside Organizations

Member camps and conference centers collaborate with other ministries, organizations, businesses and schools in countless ways. Some of these examples might inspire you to try something new.

Grace Adventures

Grace Adventures currently has several collaborative partnerships with missionally aligned organizations. Beyond just working on a project or camp experience together, the two groups become interdependent, with interrelated leadership, budgets and program models. Two examples of that are:

- Pittsburgh Youth Foundation (PYF), one of the largest youth networks in the country, brings 600 to 800 students from Cleveland and Pittsburgh to camp, along with PYF staff and church leaders. PYF spends three weeks on campus for three weeklong Surf City camp experiences. Prudhomme describes it as a collaborative relationship where PYF has 51% control over the experience.
- Cornerstone University joined Grace Adventures to develop and offer a four-year leadership program. Grace developed the curriculum and provided training centers, and the university did the training for the students. The two organizations shared budgets, program and staffing models and more for a decade.

Tejas Camp and Retreat

- Feed the Need Ministries meets the needs of families in the community who need assistance with food or other support. “These are typically families who don’t get opportunities to experience camp,” Biles explained. For more than 10 years now, several times a year, Tejas hosts a family fun day where families can come to the camp and experience all Tejas has to offer, while Feed the Need Ministries sets up a grilling area with their trailers and provides burgers and prayer for people.

The Salvation Army Redwood Glen

- By partnering with the Santa Clara jail system near Salvation Army Redwood Glen Camp and Conference Center, Covert discovered emerging collaborative opportunities with moms who are incarcerated, which has dovetailed into the camp’s partnership with Angel Tree. While many people may be familiar with the Christmas gift program Angel Tree runs, it’s the Angel Tree Camping program that has blossomed at Redwood Glen. “Angel Tree has opened a much broader view for us working with families who have an incarcerated parent,” Covert shared.
- Covert’s team also works with some of the large agricultural firms in the area to serve migrant farm families. He explained that the firms “recognize that the better they can care for the children of their workers, the happier the workers are.” The firm provides transportation to camp and encourages people to embrace the opportunity for their kids to attend.

Calvin Crest

- The local Rotary chapter has been partnering with Calvin Crest for several years. “Rotary helped build two accessible cabins for us, and they send their Youth Leadership Academy students to our camp every summer,” Staman explained.
- The summer after COVID, Calvin Crest connected with a therapist who is also a guidance counselor in the local school district, who introduced the camp to other school counselors who are also therapists. Since they have summers off and wanted to give support to the camp, the counselors joyfully signed on to help. Every week during the summers since then, the camp has one or two counselors volunteering to meet the mental health needs of campers and staff. “This has been one of the greatest collaborations the camp has ever had,” Staman said.

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Collaboration does take effort and intentionality, but in a healthy work environment, it seems to take place more naturally. “The beauty of collaboration is found in the spirit of Christian community,” Covert said. “When the community is healthy and strong, it just happens.”

Whether across your teams, your town or your part of the country, there are always opportunities to collaborate and build something new. So, the next time you find another group with a shared vision, don’t just cooperate — collaborate. Say “Yes, and” and see what you can build together. ■



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