


AMP UP THE HIRING CYCLE

Ideas from CCCA members on recruiting, hiring and training





Recruiting, hiring and training staff is an ongoing process — and sometimes to keep it running smoothly, you’ve got to get creative. Fortunately, creativity is where the camp world shines.

Photo courtesy of Pine Ridge Bible Camp



At CCCA’s national conference in December 2022, some creative minds in camping got together to share tips on how to keep your hiring cycle fresh and forward-thinking so you can fully staff your camp with the best possible people. ►

Recruitment

The first step, of course, is to build your pool of applicants. In today's world of social media noise, internship demands and job offers, this can be challenging. You can't continue to do the same old things and expect to get noticed. Directors from various camps shared recruitment techniques that have been successful in recent years.

Partner on campuses

Boost the effectiveness of campus visits by partnering with organizations on the campus rather than trying to start something from scratch, suggests Jacqueline Brustkern, youth camp assistant director at Laity Lodge (Leakey, Texas). They recently catered food at a tailgate that on-campus Christian groups were hosting at Texas A&M. "It's piggybacking off the work they're already doing," says Brustkern. "Ask, 'How can we be hospitable to those organizations and get our name in front of more people?'"

Harness social media

One big pool of applicants can be found in people who follow the Instagram accounts of Christian organizations on secular campuses, says Evan Liewer, director of programs and operations at Forest Home (Forest Falls, California). He suggests sending a DM that says, "Hey, I think you might be a great fit to work at our camp. Here's a link. What do you think?"

Brustkern says to pay attention to the quality of your social media accounts. Her camp hires past staffers to run the camp's social media. "They know what people want to see," says Brustkern.

Increase your pay rate

One barrier to signing up to work for a camp is the pay rate, says James Rock, on-site director of Trout Lake Camps (Pine River, Minnesota). His camp decided to increase the pay rate to the highest in Minnesota, according to Rock.

"We needed to raise three things — camper fees, the amount of money we fundraise for our camper scholarships (to offset those higher fees) and most importantly, our summer staff salaries," Rock explains. "It's time to start paying people a fair amount and put the pressure on ourselves to fundraise the differences," he says. "If you're a college kid or an adult, you should be paid fairly."

Rock shares that Trout Lake had to increase summer camper rates by almost \$100 per week to pay their summer staff more. "Yet, the number of campers who signed up on the most recent Black Friday increased from 300 in 2021 to 800 in 2022," Rock says. "Parents are willing to pay more for a great product. Our product is greater with staff who are well cared for. Our 2023 summer staff recruiting is 20% ahead of last year, which we think is in large part due to the pay raise."

Recruit the best early

Your campers can be your best future staff, but sometimes they fall through the cracks. Rock combats this by asking his staff to take notes on campers who show promise and would be great future leaders; they use Asana, a task software, to do this. Then at the end of the summer, they send the parents of those promising kids a message, pointing out reasons why their camper was amazing (from their Asana notes) and saying, "We want them to be on staff someday." They can refer to the notes as the years go by until that camper is of staff age. ►

Boost the effectiveness of campus visits by partnering with organizations on the campus, suggests Jacqueline Brustkern of Laity Lodge (Leakey, Texas).



Photo courtesy of Camp Gilead



Photo courtesy of Eagle Sky of the Ozarks

Instruction Insights

5 tips to help your staff teach and lead

■ by Kimberly Mallory

Here are some helpful tips to get your staff ready to lead and teach your campers this summer.

1. **Do it yourself.** I ask our staff members to practice leading activities so they get a feel for how it's supposed to go.
2. **Understand the Bible (and how to teach from it).** We go over the Bible lessons that will be covered during the summer, asking staff to practice teaching. We teach our staff the difference between absolutes, convictions and preferences, as this helps them answer questions that arise during camp with an appropriate response. We also teach our staff how to walk someone through a gospel presentation.
3. **Learn about kids.** We believe it's important to teach staff about personalities and child development. It's especially helpful for them to understand that kids need information to be more concrete than abstract.
4. **Grasp group dynamics.** Helping your staff understand the basics of group dynamics is important. Even learning something as simple as where to stand when teaching or talking to a group can empower your staff to be effective teachers.
5. **Know policies and procedures.** This isn't necessarily a fun topic, but you can have fun with it. After teaching the staff your policies and procedures, consider testing them in a game format, like *Jeopardy*.



In addition to being the program director at Camp Gilead (Carnation, Washington), Kimberly Mallory has been married to Josh since 2000, and is mom to seven young men and two ladies between three and 20 years old. Kimberly has been growing in her relationship with Jesus since she was five years old and has had a passion for camp and ministry since she was young. She loves watching her kids play sports, gardening, organizing parties and enjoys sipping on an extra hot, vanilla Americano.



Photo courtesy of Camp Albemarle

Hiring

Next is the practical matter of the hiring process. What is the best way to take a recruit from applying to hiring to training? And how do you ensure you end up with the best possible staff for your camp?

Collecting and sorting applications

To ease the application process, using the right technology can be the key. Liewer uses several apps and platforms to collect and narrow the pool of applicants:

- Jotform — Applications are set up in this platform, which offers secure and customizable forms.
- Clickup — This project management tool tracks the applicant through the process, sending automated emails to update them on their status and next steps.
- Jobma — This video interview software allows applicants to answer video interview questions on their own time.
- www.youcanbook.me — Applicants schedule real-time interviews with this online scheduling tool.

The Jobma interview is a key step, according to Liewer, as it helps to narrow the field and saves the camp time when someone is not a good fit for the camp's culture.

Commitment to timing

Since this is a year-long cycle, timing in responding to applicants matters. Liewer has set deadlines for keeping in contact. "Our rule is within 48 business hours you need to respond to them, and applicants are never allowed to be stuck in a status that we control for more than seven days."

Interview questions

Once you get to the point of interviews, how can you get a sense of an applicant in one conversation? One way is to continue the conversation established in the initial application, suggests Joe Fahlman, executive director of Trout Creek Bible Camp (Corbett, Oregon).

They've had time to think about their answer in the application — when the question is asked again face-to-face, Fahlman suggests you follow up with, "And why is this important to you?" This can help solidify which applicants have thought deeply about the questions as they go through.

Liewer believes creative and outside-the-box questions can give you a real sense of someone's personality. "Two that I always ask, because I'm goofy and weird, are, 'Why are manhole covers round?' And 'If I were to hire you today and then fire you in three years, what would I be firing you for?'"

Retention

Once you've put out offers, one important step that can't be missed is keeping up communication. Brustkern suggests a phone call or setting up a chat in an app like GroupMe with hired staffers. She also recommends offering a retreat in the weeks leading up to camp. Fahlman's camp integrates new and returning staff for weekend retreats leading up to camp to establish community and connections. ►

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Training

Now that you've got your staff hired, it's time to make sure they are equipped to run an incredible camp experience. Kimberly Mallory, program director at Camp Gilead (Carnation, Washington), suggests five essential ingredients for a successful training process that makes the best use of your time and pours into your staff both at camp and beyond.

Instruction

This first step includes passing along everything your staff will need to know to run an effective camp. Mallory says don't assume people already have the knowledge needed for the job.

Aside from instruction for day-to-day operations, you'll also want to cover safety information, child abuse prevention and disciplinary measures. It's also helpful for staff to know the basic history of the camp and its theology. (See more of the instruction Mallory teaches to her new staff in the sidebar on page 20.)

As part of this step, Mallory also brings in a parent panel of 8 to 12 parents to talk about their worries, hopes and fears. "This helps staff to understand that these parents are bringing their most precious, prized possession, and this isn't just a fun little play day," says Mallory.

Reflection

"We need to remember that our staff are coming from very, very busy lives," explains Mallory. "And I want to give them not just a week of instruction, but a week where they can decompress, breathe and just reflect."

During training, Mallory offers her staff personal study time, gives them time to work on their testimony (which they share during chapel over the summer), has campfires and does morning devotions. She also has staff write a "letter to myself in August," where they can consider what they would want themselves to know or have learned by the end of summer.

Community

Training is an awesome time to build community that will last all summer. For this, Mallory disrupts natural groups by having different table themes at mealtimes

like, "people with dogs" or "people with cats" at different tables, assigning random housing groups and assigning work groups to accomplish tasks around camp together.

She also makes the staff learn and teach five "back pocket" games they can use throughout the summer and leads team-building exercises like ropes courses and challenges.

Mallory likes to involve alumni in community building, hosting an "alumni panel" where they can talk about what camp meant to them. "This creates community because the staff begin to realize that they are part of something bigger than them," she says.

Surprise

Mallory says it's important to work a sense of surprise into training. "I do this because I don't want them to be dependent on what's going to happen next and because their schedule changes so fast all summer," says Mallory. "It helps them to be flexible and just roll with it."

She sometimes kicks off training with a surprise 24-hour camping trip. You can throw in an afternoon scavenger hunt or change up daily timing with an early morning breakfast hike. "They're ready for adventure," says Mallory. "All these surprise things are also building community."

Ownership

Staff need a chance to put themselves into camp so they can have a sense of ownership, explains Mallory. This could be adding their own creative ideas to games or stage decoration or taking over kitchen and bathroom duties and camp maintenance so they understand these processes. It's also helpful for staff to understand your camp culture so they connect with it personally.

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The right staff is out there. Put these practical tips to use to fill your team with the best possible recruits. Then with the right training, you can equip your staff to have an incredible summer and keep them coming back for more when the cycle begins again. ■

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Photo courtesy of Wildwood Hills Ranch



Photo courtesy of Camp Harlow



Mollie Ottenhoff is a freelance writer and lover of books, food and the joy of raising her two kids with her husband near Chicago. Her work has been featured on *Scary Mommy* and *Listen to Your Mother*. She is a published children's author, playwright and an annual family-camp attendee. She examines the terribly awesome ride called life at MeetTheOtts.com.