

Best Practices

For International Staff in American Camp Association Camps

The following “best practices” have been identified as those that directly contribute to the success of the cultural exchange experience for the camp and for the staff member. They also support the legal and regulatory obligations of the exchange visa program.

CAMP

Sponsoring Agency and Administrative Practices

Expected practices of directors:

- Understand that the governmental purpose of the J-1 visa program is for cultural exchange and implement that philosophy.
- Understand and comply with regulatory opportunities and limitations of the J-1 visa programs.
- Establish a strong relationship with sponsoring agency and meet financial obligations to them.
- Complete SEVIS validation for arriving staff promptly according to sponsoring agency procedures.
- Assist international staff in obtaining a Social Security card if necessary.
- Provide appropriate wages and access to money owed. (Note that checks are hard for internationals to cash. Offer help with that process!)
- Provide worker’s compensation insurance according to requirements of state regulations.
- Develop and implement a crisis plan for dealing with injury to, arrest, or death of an international.
- Develop and implement policies that include immediate notification to sponsoring agency of any personnel action, including a change of location/site within the organization, or any emergency situation with an international staff member.

Exemplary practices of directors:

- Feature cultural programming in camp.
- Show international programs and staff in camp marketing materials.

Hiring Process

Expected practices of directors:

- Define and articulate why the camp wants to include internationals on their staff (other than filling vacancies).
- Interview the potential applicant on the phone prior to hiring.
- Be thorough in evaluating candidates and selecting staff.
- Spend as much time in the hiring process as you do with American staff.
- Show honesty in matching candidates’ skills and interests with their needs.
- Provide clear expectations of staff while at camp.

Exemplary practices of directors:

- Define and articulate how inclusion of international staff fits into their camp philosophy.
- Avoid stereotyping nationalities by demonstrating a willingness to hire international staff from all countries and use them in all positions.

After Hiring — Prior to Camp

Expected practices of directors:

- Talk to the staff member by phone or e-mail before camp.
- Provide advanced information by mail or e-mail including policies, handbook, organizational chart, map, weather, what to bring, camp Web site, orientation/training schedule, job descriptions, camper profile, rules and regulations, mission/purpose, time-off policies, transportation-to-town options, e-mail of mentor/buddy, local attractions/local community info, etc.
- Present a realistic picture of the camp and establish expectations, i.e., help with understanding of rural community differences, sleeping accommodations, typical menus.

Exemplary practices of directors:

- Provide opportunities for effective networking with former international staff in their country, e.g., share e-mail addresses of former camp staff.

Arrival and Pre-camp

Expected practices of directors:

- Provide comfortable/efficient transportation to camp from orientation site.
- Arrange for welcoming of international staff on arrival.
- Show sensitivity to time and cultural adjustments needed.
- Provide adequate housing that is welcoming and clean, including linens and bedding.
- Provide separate orientation/training for international staff to help them make cultural adjustment.
- Make an active effort to integrate groups of staff.
- Show sensitivity to language issues.
- Demonstrate in training an understanding in dealing with cultural differences, sexual practices, hygiene, sexual harassment, fashions, etc.
- Provide responsible education/orientation and training for understanding and competence.
- Show sensitivity to food issues, health/stamina issues, allergies, cultural and religious practices, e.g., lactose intolerance, pork.

Exemplary practices of directors:

- Demonstrate a real attitude of “I care about you and want you to have a successful summer.”
- Provide training to American staff on purpose of J-1 visa program and how to create a successful international team.
- Utilize a contact/liaison on camp staff who understands international issues.
- Develop a buddy/mentor system.

During the Summer

Expected practices of directors:

- Provide positive feedback and reinforcement.
- Continue to acknowledge and work with language differences.
- Help arrange transportation on time off.
- Continue to partnership with agency on “problems.”
- Show sensitivity to financial issues — e.g., cashing checks.
- Provide secure place for papers and valuables.
- Provide access to a telephone.
- Treat all staff as adults; treat support staff equal to program staff.
- Have trained/competent supervisors.
- Provide for open communication between the director and international staff.
- Provide Internet access — e-mail.
- Demonstrate a real VALUING of international staff and acceptance of cultural differences.
- Provide ongoing training and support.
- Provide at least some cultural programming as a part of the camp’s activities.
- Show sensitivity to health issues — doctors, dentists, medications, etc.
- Encourage staff to obey the rules of the program and return to home country after the summer.
- Support the rules governing the J-1 program, which restricts switching staff between support and counseling roles.
- Develop a program of training and support to solve a problem, using fair termination policy as a last resort and only after consultation with the sponsoring agency.
- Provide opportunities for out-of-camp recreational or area tourist experiences.
- Make provisions for international staff to do their laundry.
- Give access to camp activities and facilities.
- Treat American and international staff equally especially in number of hours required to work and adequate time off.

Exemplary practices of directors:

- Have outstanding cultural programming.
- Provide international staff with access to food and snacks from their home culture as well as “home” newspapers.
- Provide multi-national opportunities showing diversity in camp.
- Feature some international staff and programming in the camp video.
- Identify and work with local family or alumni sponsors to integrate staff into the local community.
- Provide international staff with equal access to key positions and leadership opportunities.
- Help with transportation post-camp.

SPONSORING AGENCY

Expected practices of agencies:

- Understand, monitor, and comply with all issues, regulations, and requirements of the J-1 cultural exchange Camp Counselor and Summer Work Travel programs.
- Conduct thorough in-person interviews with every applicant using a suitably qualified interviewer.
- Recruit applicants with a good level of English.
- Conduct thorough in-depth, pre-departure &/or arrival orientation.
- Provide twenty-four hour emergency support for applicants during their J-1 visa term.
- Provide camps with as much information as possible on applicants.
- Provide applicants with information about US culture as well as different types of camps, the nature of camp life, and working with children.
- Spot check references to ensure quality applicants are being accepted.
- Require participants to provide a background check and provide help for this when necessary.
- Place participants at camps and in positions best suited to their skills, interests, background, and experience.

Exemplary practices of agencies:

- Ensure that staff placed as camp counselors understand they will be working with children and are suitable candidates to do so.
- Encourage camps to hire participants from a variety of countries.
- Provide camps with information about participants’ countries/cultures.
- Educate camps on the best way to host international staff.
- Provide readily accessible and quality ongoing care, advice, and support for participants and camps during the summer, including camp visiting and the collection and monitoring of feedback.
- Monitor and evaluate information about the quality of the experience provided to international staff by each camp and work with camps and participants to improve the overall program experience and level of agency service.

AMERICAN CAMP ASSOCIATION

Expected practices of ACA:

- Monitor public policy issues related to the J-1 visa exchange program and keep camp professionals informed of those policies
- Keep J-1 visa regulatory and legislative issues as a priority focus of ACA public policy.
- Facilitate communication with and among sponsoring agencies.
- Promote the benefits of cultural exchange programs to camps and the public in general.
- Develop and track statistical information that is of value to camps, the agencies, and ACA.

Exemplary practices of ACA:

- Provide educational resources to help camp professionals address international staff issues.



BEST PRACTICES

For International Staff in American Camp Association Camps

The availability of international staff is made possible by a number of organizations that are formally designated as cultural exchange programs by the U.S. Department of State (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs). Over the last several decades, the use of such staff has evolved from a value-added opportunity into a vital resource for many American summer camps. As this trend continues, we must take care not to lose sight of the cultural exchange aspect of these programs. We must also remember that these governmental programs carry with them a number of regulatory obligations that international staff, camps, and agencies must meet. Compliance has a special significance these days in the delicate balance between increased concerns for security and support for cultural exchange.

ACA volunteers and staff meet regularly with the leaders of the international cultural exchange organizations who work with the camp community in providing international staff for camps. This partnership has allowed us to promote the benefits of the cultural exchange programs and to influence public policy affecting these programs. This unified approach with the agencies that recruit and screen young people from other countries to work at U.S. camps also allows us to address the issues and trends that have emerged in the programs and to isolate the basic expectations for participating camps. In addition, we have enumerated exemplary practices, i.e., those practices that display a higher degree of commitment to the education and welfare of internationals and the tenets of cultural exchange.

As camp professionals, we unite to address environmental, educational, legal, and financial issues. We set standards for which we hold ourselves accountable, and we understand the moral and ethical aspects of conducting an enterprise that is essentially human in nature. It is reasonable, therefore, that we identify and engage in best practices as we employ counselors and support staff from overseas. Moreover, following such practices is consistent with our mission: ". . . enriching the lives of children and adults through the camp experience."

We are proud of the fact that many of our members already make extensive use of these practices. Whether you currently use international staff, or plan to do so in the future, we hope that they serve as a useful tool for benchmarking current methods and procedures. We look forward to ongoing cooperation with camps and international staffing agencies as we maximize and enhance our use of this most important human resource and celebrate the youth development opportunities these programs afford.

International Staffing Resources

Sponsoring agencies would be happy to help you strengthen your international staffing practices or put you in touch with directors who do it effectively. The following agencies collaborated with ACA to create the Best Practices for international staffing at camp:

BUNAC/Summer Camp USA

P.O. Box 430
Southbury, CT 06488
800-GO BUNAC
203-264-0901
Fax: 203-264-0251
www.bunac.org

Camp America

River Plaza
9 West Broad Street
Stamford, CT 06902-3788
800-727-8233
Fax: 203-399-5590
www.campamerica.aifs.com

Camp Leaders

595 Race Street
Denver, CO 80206
303-333-5041
www.campleaders.com

CCUSA — Camp Counselors USA

2330 Marinship Way, Suite 250
Sausalito, CA 94965
800-999-2267
415-339-2728
Fax: 415-339-2744
www.ccusa.com

Cultural Homestay International Camp Adventure USA

104 Butterfield Road
San Anselmo, CA 94960
800-777-5724
Fax: 415-459-2182
www.chinet.org

InterExchange Camp USA

161 6th Avenue
New York, NY 10013
212-924-0446
Fax: 212-924-0575
www.interexchange.org

International Counselor Exchange Program

38 West 88th Street
New York, NY 10024-2502 US
212-787-7706
212-580-9283
www.international-counselors.org

International YMCA ICCP

5 West 63rd Street 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10023
888-477-9622
www.ymcanyc.org

Jewish Community Centers Association of North America

15 East 26th Street
New York, NY 10010
212-786-5126
Fax: 212-481-4174
www.jcca.org