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## Trends and Issues in Not for Profit Camping

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## Trends and Issues in Not for Profit Camping

### Cover Page Footnote

The American Camping Association (ACA) Not for Profit Forum and Council funded this study.

## TRENDS AND ISSUES IN NOT FOR PROFIT CAMPING

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Not for profit camps have served thousands of children, adults, and families over the years. These agencies have often provided the only opportunities that some young people have to attend camp. Not for profit camps, however, are under increased pressures to scrutinize the scope of their services concerning appropriateness, commitment, and economic viability. The traditions of camping for children, youth, and adults remain strong, but camp leaders must address trends and issues if camping programs in the not for profit sector are to flourish in the coming years. As organized camping becomes more market conscious, questions arise as to who will be able to go to camp, at what cost, under what external controls, and within what expectations for services and outcomes.

The purpose of this study was to examine influences on not for profit agencies involved in camping programs to determine critical trends and issues related to organized camping. The American Camping Association (ACA) Not for Profit Forum and Council funded this study. The project consisted of three data collection phases: 1) an extensive literature review; 2) a survey sent to a random sample of camp directors and their not for profit agency executives; and 3) focus groups conducted at a national ACA conference. This descriptive research study uses information from the second phase of this project to present quantitative data about perceptions of the trends and issues in not for profit camping.

### BACKGROUND

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States, the charitable organization society (COS) movement was a strong voice in the social order reflecting the issues emerging during the Progressive Era of 1890 to 1915. The majority of these charitable non-profit organizations were concerned with poverty and injustice and bring-

ing these problems into society's consciousness. Just as today, the issues of poverty particularly for children, social injustice due to race, gender, and immigrant status as well as concern over alcohol and drug abuse were paramount (Lundblad, 1995). Coinciding with this focus was the settlement house movement, promoted by such women as Jane Addams, which drew heavily on the cultural values of "personal service" by settlement house workers in poor neighborhoods where they provided services (Henderson, 1982; Lundblad, 1995).

Just as the settlement house movement had its primary goals, many other organizations developed during this same time and remain visible today. Regardless of whether the focus was on the Scouts, the YMCA/YWCA, the Boys or Girls Clubs, Campfire, specialized groups like Easter Seals, private foundations like the Fresh Air Fund camps, or religiously-based organizations like Salvation Army, these not for profit organizations grew out of the desire to help meet the needs of under-served and neglected segments of society. Outdoor experiences and camping programs were a means to address these needs. This commitment to undervalued and often invisible segments of our communities remains the focus of many not for profit groups today.

When reviewing the literature about current issues of concern to not for profit organizations, several areas of importance became apparent. For example, the changing nature of American society, including the "baby boom-er" generation and Generation X, the emerging nature of the family, the ever-widening gap between the "haves" and the "have nots," the questioning of traditional values, changing gender roles, and the visibility of violence create a number of critical issues. In addition, six major areas were identified that will likely influence the structure of not for profit organizations and their camping

programs: 1) leadership and management practices, 2) funding, 3) marketing, 4) technological impacts, 5) organizational issues, and 6) staff considerations (Stubbs, 1998). Each of these areas had implications for trends regarding organizational mission, strategic management, and societal concerns.

## METHODS

The data collection phase of this study was built on the information collected from the literature review and from insights from a panel of experts. A survey was designed to acquire information directly from camping professionals and their agency administrative executives involved with not for profit organizations about the potential trends and issues. The survey focused specifically on information about the mission of the organization and its relationship to camping (13 questions), strategic management issues (26 questions), and perceptions regarding the priority of critical issues for their organizations (18 questions). One open-ended question was asked that identified the biggest challenge camp directors and agency executives thought would be faced by not for profit camps in the future. The last section of the survey focused on demographic information tailored toward either the camping professional or the administrator. Most of the survey items were designed as statements that were evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale by the individual. The open-ended question concerning the biggest challenge to be faced by not-for-profit camps was analyzed by a content analysis procedure that resulted in tallied key issues.

The questionnaire was mailed in the late Fall of 1998 to a random selection of camping professionals (N=100) and their agency executives (N=100) from the American Camping Association Not-for-Profit Forum and Council national membership list. Eighty-five surveys (43%) were returned. Of these returns, 55% were from camping professionals and 45% were from agency executives. The data were coded and statistically analyzed with descriptive, t-tests, chi-squares, and analysis of variance statistics.

## RESULTS

The total data set was initially analyzed with descriptive statistics to provide a general overview or "picture" of the data. This analysis resulted in averages and standard deviations for each item on the questionnaire and made no distinctions based on job title, agency type, or other demographics (see Table 1). After the initial analysis, additional statistical procedures were used to clarify some of the potential differences in the data.

### Profile of Respondents

The respondents who were camping professionals had been involved with camping an average of 17.5 years, with a range from 3 to 50 years. These professionals had been in their current positions for over 9 years (range=<1 to 32 years) and had been with their current not for profit organization for 13 years (range=1 to 41 years). Eighty-nine percent of the camping professionals worked in accredited camps. Many camps offered multiple camping experiences over the course of a year, so the respondents indicated all camp programs they administered. The results of the analysis indicated they offered day camp (63%), trip/travel camp (51%), retreats (36%), resident camp (89%), weekend camps (60%), family camp (55%), and specialized camps (26%). Eighty-five percent said the organization owned their camp property, and 92% said their organization believed accreditation was important.

The agency executive directors had been in their current positions for an average of 9 years (range=<1 to 30 years) and had been with their current not for profit organization for almost 17 years (range=1 to 43 years). Seventy-two percent of the executive directors indicated that they had past experience with camping. Forty-five percent of the executive directors were familiar with ACA accreditation, but 95% felt that accreditation was important for their agency's camps.

### Findings Related to Trends and Issues

After the initial descriptive statistics were completed, a general overview of the data was compiled. Since the survey was arranged into three sections that highlighted issues related to

mission of the organization, strategic management, and critical social issues, the analyses will focus on the same pattern in the discussion of findings. The results indicated that all respondents agreed most strongly with the following issues:

*Mission (Table 1)*

- Our camp program reflects our organization's mission.
- Camping is integral to our organization.
- Our mission reflects changes occurring in society.
- Our mission addresses growing diversity of people in society.
- We have a mission statement that guides all the activities we do in camping.

*Strategic Management (Table 2)*

- A big challenge is finding skilled counselors and staff willing to work for our wages.
- Maintenance and upkeep of camp facilities are high management priorities.
- Dealing with camp and staff diversity is an important issue for us.
- We want to increase our number of campers.
- We try to price to meet our budget, yet include all children.

It may be of interest to note the areas related to mission and strategic management with the most *disagreement* were:

*Mission (Table 1)*

- Our mission is affected by outside organizations such as United Way, etc.
- Camp is more of an end product of social issues rather than a means for addressing societal issues.
- The target population of our organization has changed.
- My national office (if applicable) perceives camping as more important today than in the past.

- Our participants/campers and camper families perceive camping as more important today than in the past.

*Strategic Management (Table 2)*

- Land acquisition for camp is a priority.
- Parents perceive camp as an unsafe environment more frequently than they did in the past.
- We rely heavily on volunteers to run our camp programs.
- Our camp responds to the year-round school concept.
- Coming up with new activities that appeal to kids who come to camp is easy to do.

The critical issues section dealt with how much priority was given to these issues in the camp program beyond staff training. The following list provides the top rated priorities:

*Critical Issues Addressed by Camp (Table 3)*

- Our camp program stresses to staff their role as positive adult role models.
- Our camping program offers opportunities to teach about ethics and values.
- Our camping program focuses on building community and doing group work.
- Our camping program promotes cross-cultural understanding.
- Our camping program addresses behavior issues of children and youth.

Of interest to note were the critical issues that respondents felt were of little or no priority in their camping programs:

- Our camp acts as an intervention with gang issues.
- Our camping program offers programs for older adults.
- Our camping program teaches good parenting and child-rearing skills.
- Our camping program often acts as an intervention with youth and parents.

**TABLE 1**  
*Trends and Issues in Not for Profit Camping Questionnaire Results Related to Mission*

(The Likert scale rating for the following statements is  
1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=unsure, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.)

Mission of Not for Profit Organization	Mean	SD	Admin*	Provider**
1. Our mission arises from local needs as opposed to national organizational mandates.	3.639	1.393	ED	Priv-GS
2. Our mission reflects changes occurring in society.	4.284	.729		
3. All our staff can articulate the mission of our organization.	3.765	.959		GS-Relig
4. Our camp program reflects our organization's mission.	4.518	.629		
5. Camp is more of an end product of social issues rather than a means for addressing societal issues.	2.238	1.048		
6. The target population of our organization has changed.	2.608	1.344		
7. Our mission is affected by outside organizations such as United Way, etc.	2.181	1.270		
8. Camping is integral to our organization.	4.432	.894	ED	
9. We have a mission statement that guides all the activities we do in camping.	4.060	.936		
10. Our mission addresses the growing diversity of people in society.	4.150	.995		GS-Relig & GS-Priv
11. Camping is perceived in my agency as more important today than in the past.	3.202	1.249		Priv-GS
12. Our participants/campers and camper families perceive camping as more important today than in the past.	2.953	.925		Priv-GS
13. My national office (if applicable) perceives camping as more important today than in the past.	2.719	1.133		Relig-GS

  

Top Five Mission Issues	Mean
m4 Camp reflects mission of organization	4.518
m8 Camping is integral to our organization	4.432
m2 Mission reflects changes occurring in society	4.284
m10 Mission addresses growing societal diversity	4.150
m9 Mission guides all camping activities	4.060

\* Under Administration, "ED" indicates the Agency Executive Director more strongly agreed with the statement than the Camping Professional. "CP" indicates the Camping Professional agreed more strongly.

\*\* Under Provider, "GS" = Girl Scouts, "YMCA/YWCA" = YMCA/YWCA, "Youth" = Other Youth organizations, "Relig" = Religious camps, and "Priv" = Private non-profit camps indicated the groups most different from each other in their ratings. The one listed first rated that item higher than did the other group. A P-value indicates a significant difference, but with no one group more different than any other.

When reviewing the descriptive information, one general observation became obvious: Even though the means were not unexpected, the standard deviations suggested that a number of respondents varied from the averages noted. The first variable examined as a likely source of differing views was the job position of the individual as either the camp administrator or the

agency executive director (see Tables 1-3, Admin. column). T-tests were run on all of the items to determine where the differences in means could be attributed to the job title. Although useful in providing a clearer view of opinions held by the two groups, these analyses did not uncover drastically different opinions on most of the questions. Only two statements

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TABLE 2  
Trends and Issues in Not for Profit Camping Questionnaire Results Related to Strategic Management

(The Likert scale rating for the following statements is 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=unsure, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.)

Strategic Management	Mean	SD	Admin.	Provider
14. Finding funding is a continual struggle for camp.	3.952	1.040		
15. Our public understands the value and importance of camp.	3.235	1.065		
16. It is difficult to explain to people who we are and what we do as camp professionals.	3.108	1.190		
17. Dealing with camp and staff diversity is an important issue for us.	4.212	.888		
18. A big challenge is finding skilled counselors and staff willing to work for our wages.	4.513	.827		
19. Balancing mid-income campers with low income campers is a challenge.	3.203	1.244		
20. Maintenance and upkeep of the camp facilities are high management priorities.	4.266	.763		
21. Land acquisition for camp is a priority.	2.365	1.256		P=.02
22. We manage well the environmental impact our camping program.	3.951	.893		Youth-Relig., Priv- of Relig., & GS-Relig.
23. We use partnerships as a way to expand our resources.	3.866	.953		
24. Our camping program responds to the year-round school concept.	2.701	1.231		
25. Laws and regulations constrain us in terms of time and money.	3.090	1.153		
26. Parents perceive camp as an unsafe environment more frequently than they did in the past.	2.560	1.034		
27. Coming up with new activities that appeal to kids who come to camp is easy to do.	2.964	1.103		
28. Our organization keeps up with societal happenings in a way that helps us see ties between our camp program and societal needs.	3.841	.895		
29. We never seem to have enough scholarships.	3.150	1.323		P=.0324
30. We try to price to meet our budget, yet still include all children.	4.063	.992		
31. We have committed to making our facilities year around operations.	3.947	1.210		
32. We are committed to including more adult programs in the camping program.	3.038	1.294		
33. Rising insurance costs are a big concern.	3.607	.944		
34. Criminal background checks are a priority when hiring camp staff.	3.843	1.087		
35. We want to increase our number of campers.	4.073	1.142		P=.0402
36. We use our camp program as a way to market membership in our organization.	3.289	1.198		
37. We rely heavily on volunteers to run our camp programs.	2.598	1.456		
38. Training and using volunteers effectively is a challenge for us.	3.486	1.060		
39. Technology will affect the way we will manage our camp in the future.	3.847	1.029		
<b>Top Five Strategic Management Issues</b>		<b>Mean</b>		
s18	Finding quality staff with our wages	4.513		
s20	Maintenance of camp facilities	4.266		
s17	Dealing with camp and staff diversity	4.212		
s35	Increase camper numbers	4.073		
s30	Include all children and meet our budget	4.063		

\* Under Administration, "ED" indicates the Agency Executive Director more strongly agreed with the statement than the Camping Professional. "CP" indicates the Camping Professional agreed more strongly.

\*\* Under Provider, "GS" = Girl Scouts, "YMCA/YWCA" = YMCA/YWCA, "Youth" = Other Youth organizations, "Relig" = Religious camps, and "Priv" = Private non-profit camps indicated the groups most different from each other in their ratings. The one listed first rated that item higher than did the other group. A P-value indicates a significant difference, but with no one group more different than any other.

**TABLE 3**  
*Trends and Issues in Not for Profit Camping Questionnaire Results Related to Critical Issues Addressed*

(The Likert scale rating for the following statements is  
1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=unsure, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.)

Critical Issues Addressed By Camp Program	Mean	SD	Admin.	Provider
40. Our camping program stresses issues of drug and alcohol abuse.	2.179	1.110		
41. Our camping program addresses behavior issues of children and youth.	3.529	1.064		
42. Our camping program stresses sexual behavior issues for girls and boys.	2.318	1.136		P=.0317
43. Our camping program acts as an intervention with gang issues.	1.659	1.053	ED	
44. Our camping program incorporates dealing with prejudice in society.	3.271	1.138	ED	
45. Our camping program emphasizes service to lower socio-economic participants.	3.059	1.218		
46. Our camping program stresses to staff their role as positive adult role models.	4.635	.553	CP	
47. Our camping program includes career planning and employment skills.	2.200	1.223		
48. Our camping program offers programs for older adults.	1.718	1.098		P=.0367
49. Our camping program deals with issues of sexual and physical abuse.	2.259	1.167		
50. Our camping program teaches good parenting and child-rearing skills.	1.788	1.048		
51. Our camping program often acts as an intervention with youth and parents.	1.741	.928		
52. Our camping program addresses disability and inclusion issues.	3.094	1.201		Priv-Youth
53. Our camping program focuses on building community and doing group work.	3.906	1.076	CP	
54. Our camping program promotes cross cultural understanding.	3.690	1.108		GS-Youth & GS-Relig
55. Our camping program addresses the competition for time that exists in children's lives.	2.941	1.062		
56. Our camping program recognizes and responds to the changing family structures in society.	3.341	1.140		GS-Relig
57. Our camping program offers opportunities to teach about ethics and values.	4.082	1.014		GS-Priv

  

Top Five Critical Social Issues	Mean
c46 Stresses to staff their role as positive role models	4.635
c57 Offers opportunities to teach about ethics and values	4.082
c53 Focus on building community and group work	3.906
c54 Promotes cross-cultural understanding	3.690
c41 Addresses behavior issues of youth	3.529

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about mission were statistically significant by job title: "Our mission arises from local needs as opposed to national organizational mandates" and "Camping is integral to our organization." In both cases, the executive director agreed more strongly with the statement than did the camping professional. No significant differences were

found on any strategic management issues. Four statements were significantly different on the critical issues statements. The executive directors gave higher priorities than did the camping professionals to "Our camping program acts as an intervention with gang issues" and "Our camping program incorporates dealing with



prejudice in society." Camping professionals, however, gave higher priorities to "Our camping program stresses to staff their role as positive adult role models" and "Our camping program focuses on building community and doing group work." These differences were interesting to note but did not seem to reflect the differences in opinions as suggested by the standard deviations.

The remaining likely variable was type of not for profit agency represented by the respondents (see Tables 1-3, Provider column). Originally, 19 different not for profit organizations were identified. These organizations were collapsed into five major types of providers based upon representation within our sample: Girl Scouts (32%), other predominantly youth serving organizations like Boy Scouts, Campfire, Boys and Girls Clubs (13%), the YMCA/YWCAs (11%), private not-for-profit foundations (27%), and religiously-affiliated organizations (17%). One-way analysis of variance was selected to analyze the means for differences based upon these five group types. A Scheffé's post-hoc analysis procedure was also used in any cases with statistically significant differences to determine the specific groups exhibiting the differing opinions.

The findings from these analyses were revealing. In many cases the respondents from the Girl Scouts differed statistically from the other providers although not exclusively. For example, when analyzing the section addressing the mission (see Table 1), the questions related to mission coming from the local needs rather than national mandates, camping being perceived within the organization as more important today than in the past, and campers and families perceiving that camping is more important today, scores differed most between the private foundations who agreed with the statements ( $x = 4.2$ ,  $3.6$ , and  $3.4$  respectively) and the Girl Scouts who disagreed or were unsure ( $x = 3.0$ ,  $2.5$ , and  $2.4$  respectively). The Girl Scout group, however, more strongly agreed with statements such as their staff could articulate their mission and their mission addressed the growing diversity of society, especially when compared with the religiously-affiliated camps ( $x = 4.1$  and  $4.8$  compared to  $3.1$  and  $3.5$ ). Respondents from relig-

iously affiliated camps believed most strongly that their national offices perceived camping as more important today than in the past ( $x = 3.6$ ), while the Girl Scouts disagreed with this idea ( $x = 2.1$ ).

The strategic management section also had several statistically significant differences based on organizational perspective (see Table 2). For example, religiously affiliated camp respondents *disagreed* most with the statements that they managed the environmental impacts from the camping program ( $x = 3.1$ ) well and that land acquisition was a priority ( $x = 1.7$ ). Private foundations agreed more than the other groups that they never seemed to have enough scholarships ( $x = 3.9$ ), but they did not perceive a need to increase their camper numbers ( $x = 3.6$ ) as much as the Y's ( $x = 4.6$ ) or the Girl Scouts ( $x = 4.5$ ).

The last section to be analyzed by the types of organizations was the critical issues addressed by the camp program (see Table 3). Several statistically significant differences could be found on the ratings based upon organizational type. Although none of the programs prioritized stressing positive sexual behavior issues for boys and girls, the religiously affiliated camps rated that issue significantly higher ( $x = 2.9$ ) than the other types of organizations. Another issue that was not highly prioritized was offering programs for older adults. The private not for profit foundations prioritized this issue higher than the other groups ( $x = 2.2$ ). When asked if inclusion and disability issues were a priority, these foundations significantly rated this issue higher ( $x = 3.6$ ), as did the Girl Scouts ( $x = 3.2$ ), than did the other youth serving organizations ( $x = 2.2$ ), the YMCA/ YWCA's ( $x = 2.4$ ), and religiously affiliated camps ( $x = 2.9$ ). The Girl Scouts placed a high priority ( $x = 4.4$ ) on camps promoting cross cultural understanding while other youth serving organizations and religiously-affiliated camps prioritized that issue lower ( $x = 2.9$  and  $3.0$ , respectively). The Girl Scouts also significantly prioritized the recognizing and responding to changing family structures ( $x = 4.0$ ) more so than religiously-affiliated camps ( $x = 2.8$ ), and they placed a high priority on teaching ethics and values ( $x = 4.4$ ) in camp.

**TABLE 4**  
*Most Frequently Cited Overall Issues in Not for Profit Camping Questionnaire Results*

Top Five OVERALL ISSUES	Mean
c46 Stresses to staff their role as positive role models	4.635
m4 Camp reflects mission of organization	4.518
s18 Finding quality staff with our wages	4.513
m8 Camping is integral to our organization	4.432
m2 Mission reflects changes occurring in society	4.284

The last question on the survey was an open-ended question that asked the respondent to list the biggest challenges that face not for profit camps. A compilation of these responses indicated that staffing issues and financial issues were the greatest concerns (37% and 38%, respectively), followed by the need for better public awareness and visibility for camping (i.e., relevancy, organizational priority, increasing competition, changing public perception, legislation, evaluation) (19%) and camper issues (need to increase numbers and organizational membership base) (5%).

The last analysis completed was the overall ranking of issues from the entire survey (see Table 4). In order beginning with the most frequent responses, the respondents listed the following:

- a high to critical priority was placed on the need for camp programs to stress to staff their role as positive adult role models.
- camp programs reflect their organization's mission.
- a big challenge is finding skilled counselors and staff willing to work for our wages.
- camping is integral to the organization
- the organization's mission reflects changes occurring in society.

It was interesting to note that three of these top five issues referred back to the mission of the organization and the role of camping in meeting the mission.

## DISCUSSION

The findings from the survey provided several conclusions yet raised additional issues for further consideration. Several major conclusions were based upon the findings from this survey:

- Camping professionals and their executive directors were supportive of the role of camping within the mission of the organization. Camp was perceived as integral to the organization, even though some respondents felt less support from the agency, the national office, the parents, and the campers themselves than in the past. Camping programs from agencies with national organizations often functioned as autonomous units with a broad flexible mission that allowed the local unit to tailor their programs to fit their immediate needs.
- Type of not for profit organization seemed to influence to a certain extent the way that issues related to mission, strategic management, and prioritization of critical issues were addressed. Although all of these not for profit camping programs shared some common concerns, procedures, and organizational climates, they also had individual differences and needs.
- Staffing issues were of critical concern to camping professionals and their executives. Among the most salient concerns were being able to pay salaries to attract the high quality staff and dealing with diversity issues with campers and staff.

- Funding, especially for maintenance and upkeep of camp facilities, was a critical concern. Other issues related to the concern for funding were rising insurance costs, need for scholarships, and keeping costs low enough to allow kids the opportunity to experience camp and still make the budget.
- Camp appeared to suffer from an "image problem" within some organizations. Although camping was perceived as a great place to build a sense of community and teamwork, teach values and ethics, promote cross-cultural understanding, and address behavior issues in youth, camping professionals seemed to struggle with the public and at times in their own agency, regarding the importance of camp.
- Respondents said they wanted to increase camper numbers and include all children. Yet, they struggled to balance mid-income and low-income campers, to meet the need for scholarships, and to find staff to serve as positive role models.

The value in this study is that a baseline has been established around the issues that seem to be most relevant to camping professionals in not for profit agencies. Although differences existed about the importance and relevancy of some of the issues, commonalities were also apparent. These data, combined with other information, will provide a foundation for decision-making

within not for profit camping organizations in the future.

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