

CAMP ADMINISTRATION 101

COUNSELOR IN TRAINING PROGRAM



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Counselor in Training or CIT is typically a program for high school students to volunteer within your camp program. If the program is set up properly it will provide the students on the job training to assist your paid counselors in hopes that they become counselors down the road. A CIT program can not only help current staffing needs by having extra hands on deck, it is also a feeder program to provide a pipeline of quality paid counselors that will already have training and experience within your program. Here are some guidelines to start your CIT program.

PLAN AND OUTLINE YOUR PROPOSED PROGRAM

When starting your program, put together the outline & materials that will guide your program. Similar to your staffing plan, you want to have a plan to recruit, train, manage, and retain your CIT's. Here are some things to include in your program outline:

- ✓ A Volunteer job description. Set clear expectations for your CIT's and treat them as you would treat staff.
- ✓ Outline program benefits that you can market to potential CIT's.
- ✓ Create marketing material for recruiting CIT's. You want to market your program as an on the job training program that could lead to employment. Make sure your potential CIT's see the value of joining your program and don't think of it as just working for free.
- ✓ Create a timeline on how you envision the volunteers come through your program. This would be from the time they are recruited to the program to when they complete the program. You want to make sure you are prepared for the commitment it takes to manage your program.
- ✓ Have an application for students to fill out and apply to the program.

PARTNER WITH LOCAL HIGH SCHOOLS

The best thing you can do to get your CIT program started is to partner with all your local high schools. Get the Principal & Guidance Counselor on board with the value your program will bring their students so they can help you promote it and recruit students. Many high school programs and clubs will also have mandatory volunteer hour requirements. If students know they can get their required hours in your CIT program it provides a fun way to do so and will gain attention among the students. Partnering with the schools are key in making sure students get this information.



SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

When your CIT program starts to gain traction it is important to set expectations before they officially join the program. If you fail to set expectations prior to getting started, you may see students start to drop out of the program in the middle of it, which is the last thing you want to leave you high and dry. Here are a few things you can do to make sure they know what there are committing to.

Have time commitments and availability as part of your application process. It is ideal to find students that are able to commit for the entire program, but chances are you will have them tell you which weeks of camp they can work and schedule them accordingly. If they cannot work the entire program, you can set minimum requirements.

Do an orientation with their parents in attendance. This should be the only time you want their parents involved, but it's a good idea to make sure they know what is required as well. If something does come up, they are the ones who will hold the student accountable. After orientation, there is no need to have their parents involved once they join the program.

Review the counselor handbook with them. You will treat them the same as staff within your CIT program so go over some main points in your handbook and make sure they are aware of what they can and cannot do as part of your program prior to joining.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The most important part of your CIT program is the training & development of your volunteers that you are preparing to be future staff. Having untrained volunteers out in the field can become as much of a liability as having untrained staff so you want to put forth the effort needed to prepare them for camp. Here are some guidelines for training your CIT's.

- ✔ Put them through the same training program with your paid staff.
- ✔ Add training with just the CIT's to get them acclimated to your program and review expectations before you get them started.
- ✔ Use ice breakers and teambuilding to get them to come out of their shell and working together.
- ✔ Train your counselors on how to get the most out of the CIT's they work with and what tasks are appropriate and not appropriate to take on. If your counselors are not utilizing the skills of the CIT they are working with you may end up with a disconnected volunteer that is more likely to drop out of the program.

MANAGING YOUR CIT'S

Once camp starts you will begin to manage your CIT's the same way as your staff and treat them as assistant camp counselors. Here are some guidelines to manage your CIT's:

- ✔ Be as flexible as you can with scheduling and only schedule them based on their availability that meets your minimum requirements. Schedule out the entire camp and once they receive and confirm their schedule, make them responsible for filling a shift if something comes up.
- ✔ Make sure your CIT's are given some responsibilities within their groups. They shouldn't just do all the dirty work or things their counselors don't want to do. Give them the opportunity to coordinate activities and other camp things just as counselors would.
- ✔ Don't leave your CIT's in charge of groups on their own. They should be paired with paid staff to assist them where needed.
- ✔ Keep parents informed if disciplinary action is needed or the student is not meeting expectations. The last thing you want is that a CIT has to be supervised like a camper. If that is the case and improvement is not made, remove them from the program.
- ✔ Give recognition after they complete the program. Make sure to keep in touch with those that would advance to a paid staff member and have a way to facilitate that transition. Those that are not ready yet can continue in the CIT program until they can become a staff member.



Planning, creating partnerships, training and managing your CIT program can provide your camp with a constant & consistent flow of quality staffing resources. Combat any shortfalls you may have with staffing with a well run and organized CIT program that will take your camp to the next level!



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