

CAMP ADMINISTRATION 101

YOUTH CAMP ADVOCACY



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Advocacy is defined as any attempt to influence someone or support something to effect change. Advocating for your industry can have many benefits such as funding, strengthening public perception, increasing participation, encourage more to start programs, strengthening current programs, and more.



As a camp industry professional it is important to play a part in advocating for youth camps and programs alike. Whether you are part of a private camp organization, non profit, or parks and recreation department, it is important that agencies, stakeholders, and decision makers in your community and around your state understand the importance and impact of these types of programs. Here are 12 guidelines on things you can do to play a part in advocating for youth camps:

- 1. Have a Plan:** Just like anything else, have a plan on how you can advocate, what you want to focus on, and who to contact.
- 2. Be Informed:** Know your industry and the issues or roadblocks that may prevent it from moving forward.
- 3. Educate and Engage the Community:** Hold meetings, hold an open house of your facility, attend meetings, send letters to decision makers, post on social media or message boards, etc. to get your message out. Community awareness and public perception is extremely important.
- 4. Build Relationships:** Build relationships with local politicians, civic organizations, and other large groups or decision makers in your area.
- 5. Look for Strategic Partners:** Find like-minded groups in your area that provides similar services or advocates for a similar cause. Look for partnership opportunities that can make your support stronger.
- 6. Join a Professional Association:** There are many national associations that advocate for our industry where you can meet like minded professionals or networking and education opportunities. On a national level the National Parks and Recreation Association or American Camp Association are two great organizations. You can look locally at organizations like your Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, or any Civic Youth Organizations.
- 7. Build a Coalition:** Within your efforts to build relationships and find partners, get together your own coalition of like minded professionals or groups to strengthen your cause.
- 8. Time Your Efforts:** Sometimes to get a message across or to reach an advocacy goal, timing is everything. Generally the sooner you can get the information out the better.



- 9. Communicate and Promote:** Communicate your cause to your current stakeholders and within the local community. Build relationships with local news outlets. Include verbiage on the importance of youth camp programs in your manuals, on your website, etc. so it is always front and center.
- 10. Participate in Public Policy:** Know the local, state, and federal policies and legislation that effects your industry. Participate in the process to effect change.
- 11. Be a Leader:** Effective advocacy requires effective leadership to use your position on influence and achieve your goals.
- 12. Look Within:** Those involved in your programs such as your staff, volunteers, and camp parents are your biggest advocates, fans, and cheerleaders. Make sure they understand the importance of their roles in the camp industry so they can continue the positive word of mouth of your program and camps in generally throughout your community.



Messaging is a large part of advocacy. Having the right message by promoting the benefits of the camp and recreation industry will go a long way while advocating for these types of programs. Here is a summary of benefits that have a direct impact on the youth that participate in these programs:

- ✓ Develops Social Skills
- ✓ Personal Growth, Learning and Development
- ✓ Promotes Teamwork, Leadership, and Character Development
- ✓ Supports Physical Activity, Health and Wellness
- ✓ Builds Confidence and Self-Esteem
- ✓ Provides Opportunities for New Experiences
- ✓ Having Positive Role Models and Making Memories

Having Camp or Recreation programs and facilities in a community also has many benefits to a community as a whole such as:

- ✓ Community Revitalization
- ✓ Community Engagement
- ✓ Economic Impact and Development
- ✓ Safer Neighborhoods
- ✓ Help Children Learn
- ✓ Improve Health and Wellness

At times advocacy can seem like a daunting task, but the rewards and benefits can be extraordinary. Embracing the process to institute change, progress the industry, and promote growth will provide benefits for you as a professional, your organization, and the camp industry for many generations to come.



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