

Recreation Program Director

Snapshot

Career Cluster(s): Hospitality & Tourism; Human Services; Sports & Entertainment

Interests: Physical education, recreational activities, planning events and programs

Earnings (2018 Median): \$48,215 yearly

Employment & Outlook: Faster Than Average Growth Expected

OVERVIEW

Sphere of Work

Recreation program directors work for private institutions as well as municipalities, developing and coordinating recreation needs for residents and visitors, including children, seniors, and adults. Recreation program directors develop these recreation programs by assessing community or service audience recreation needs; hiring and evaluating recreation workers and additional staff; overseeing the safety and maintenance of grounds, equipment, and facilities; promoting the recreation program to the community; planning events; scheduling programs; keeping records on program happenings and staff; and



fundraising through direct solicitation and grant-writing. Recreation program directors manage both public and private recreation programs through a variety of host agencies or institutions such as schools, camps, resorts, public agencies, retirement facilities, and hospitals.

Work Environment

Recreation program directors spend their workdays overseeing recreation programs in a wide variety of indoor and outdoor settings, including schools, public recreation centers, private resorts, indoor childcare centers, playgrounds, sports fields, swimming pools, residential facilities, or day camps. A recreation program director's work environment may involve extremes of heat, cold, or noise. Given the diverse demands of the recreation profession, recreation program directors may need to work a combination of days, evenings, weekends, vacation, and summer hours to ensure program success.

Profile

Working Conditions: Work Both Indoors and Outdoors

Physical Strength: Light Work

Education Needs: Technical/Community College, Bachelor's Degree

Licensure/Certification: Recommended

Physical Abilities Not Required: No Heavy Labor

Opportunities for Experience: Internship, Military Service, Part-Time Work

Holland Interest Score*: ESA

* See Appendix A

Occupation Interest

Individuals drawn to the recreation field tend to be charismatic, intelligent, and organized people who have the ability to quickly assess situations, utilize resources, and solve problems. Successful recreation program directors are responsible leaders who display effective time management skills, a strong sense of initiative, and a concern for individuals and society. Recreation program directors should enjoy physical activity and spending time with

a wide range of people, including those with special needs and those from diverse cultural, social, and educational backgrounds.

A Day in the Life—Duties and Responsibilities

The daily occupational duties and responsibilities of recreation program directors will be determined by the individual's area of

job specialization and work environment. Recreation program directors must be able to assess the recreational needs and abilities of individuals, groups, or the local community. Before their busy season, they typically spend time interviewing, hiring, and evaluating recreation workers and staff, including food service workers and maintenance crews. They spend a portion of each day supervising seasonal and full-time recreation workers, such as lifeguards, coaches, and activity leaders, and overseeing the safety, upkeep, and maintenance of grounds, equipment, and facilities. Recreation program directors promote the recreation program to the local community through flyers, websites, e-mails, and press releases. They also plan and schedule program events such as tournaments, nature studies, leagues, dances, team sports, and classes, and periodically brainstorm new ways to recruit volunteers for all aspects of the recreation program. Conducting program assessment and evaluation through surveys and feedback requests is one way in which recreation program directors can gain an understanding of the success of their programming.

Recreation program directors have many legal, financial, and administrative responsibilities, such as ensuring that their recreation program meets national requirements for safety and the Americans with Disabilities Act, planning the short-term and long-term recreation program budget, and conducting background checks on staff, volunteers, and contractors. Recreation directors are sometimes responsible for raising money for programming through grant-writing, fundraising, and donation requests. Part of the job involves keeping the recreation program in the public eye so that it will continue to attract patrons and contributions. The recreation program director may represent the recreation program at conferences and meetings, including local and national recreation society meetings, or meet periodically with institutional supervisors, such as parks and recreation department commissioners, facility owners, or other stakeholders.

All recreation program directors are responsible for accurate record keeping on program safety, accidents, and staff performance.

Duties and Responsibilities

- **Developing and overseeing recreational programs**
- **Setting up schedules and activities**
- **Soliciting financial resources**
- **Coordinating human resources**
- **Directing specialized activities and events**
- **Publicizing and promoting programs to the community**
- **Maintaining facilities in good working order**
- **Ensuring safety of all patrons and staff**
- **Dealing with emergencies as necessary**

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Physical Environment

The immediate physical environment of recreation program directors varies based on the program's focus and location. Recreation program directors spend their workdays coordinating activities in a wide variety of settings including schools, public recreation centers, indoor childcare centers, ice skating rinks, hospitals, playgrounds, sports fields, pools and aquatic centers, residential facilities, or day camps. Most recreation directors spend part of their work day outdoors, but the majority of their time is spent inside an office.

Human Environment

Recreation program directors work with a wide variety of people and should be comfortable meeting with colleagues, supervisors, program benefactors, staff, children, the elderly, people with physical disabilities, and families. Because they represent the program to the public and function in a supervisory or administrative role, they should enjoy meeting new people and spending much of their job managing others. Excellent communication skills are an advantage.

Relevant Skills and Abilities

Communication Skills

- Promoting an idea
- Speaking effectively

Interpersonal/Social Skills

- Asserting oneself
- Being sensitive to others
- Motivating others

Organization & Management Skills

- Coordinating tasks
- Demonstrating leadership
- Managing people/groups

Other Skills

- Being physically active

Technological Environment

Recreation program directors must be comfortable using computers to access information and records, Internet communication tools for e-mail, social media, and program websites, and cell phones to ensure availability during on-call hours or in case of an emergency. Those recreation program directors coordinating a specialized recreation program, such as metalworking or a ropes course, may also need to be comfortable training others in the use of techniques they have just learned

themselves. They should be certified in CPR and other lifesaving techniques, and be at ease using related equipment.

EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND ADVANCEMENT

High School/Secondary

High school students interested in pursuing a career as a recreation program director should prepare themselves by developing good study habits. High school study of physical education, foreign language, public safety, sociology, psychology, and education will provide a strong foundation for work as a recreation program director or college-level work in the field. High school students interested in this career path will benefit from seeking part-time or seasonal work that exposes the students to diverse groups of people and recreational activities. They can also obtain certification in lifesaving techniques through their school or town.

Suggested High School Subjects

- Accounting
- Algebra
- Applied Communication
- Arts
- Business
- Business Law
- Business Math
- Crafts
- English
- Physical Education
- Social Studies

Famous First

The first summer camp for boys was Camp Comfort in Milford, Conn, established in 1861. It was founded by Frederick William Gunn, founder of The Gunnery prep school. The camp took 50 boys on a two-week camping trip. Today there are about 7,000 overnight camps and 5,000 day camps in the United States; together they serve over 10 million children.

Source: https://dailyhistory.org/What_is_the_history_of_summer_camps_in_the_United_States%3F

**College/Postsecondary**

Postsecondary students interested in becoming recreation program directors should earn an associate's or bachelor's degree in recreation or physical education. A small number of colleges (accredited by the National Recreation and Park Association) offer the bachelor's of parks and recreation degree. Courses in physical education, education, public safety, business management, accounting, and foreign languages may also prove useful in future recreation work. Postsecondary students can gain work experience and potential advantage in their future job searches by securing internships or part-time employment in parks and recreation departments or private recreation programs.

Related College Majors

- Adapted Physical Education/Therapeutic Recreation
- Parks, Recreation & Leisure Facilities Management
- Parks, Recreation & Leisure Studies
- Physical Education Teaching & Coaching
- Sport & Fitness Administration/Management

Adult Job Seekers

Adults seeking employment as recreation program directors should have, at a minimum, an associate's or bachelor's degree in recreation or a related field and extensive program directing experience. Some recreation programs require their directors to hold a master's degree and second language proficiency. Adult job seekers should educate themselves about the educational and professional license requirements of their home states and the organizations where they seek employment, and may benefit from joining professional associations that offer help with networking and job searches. Professional recreation associations, such as the American Camping Association and the Society of State Directors of Health, Physical Education & Recreation, generally offer job-finding workshops and maintain lists and forums of available jobs.

Professional Certification and Licensure

Professional certification and licensure is not required of general recreation program directors. Directors of specialized recreation programs, such as swimming or parks and recreation, may be required to earn specialized certification as a condition of employment. Lifeguard certification, pool operations certification, and CPR/First Aid certification is offered by the American Lifeguard Association and requires coursework and passing an examination. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) certificate is offered in therapeutic recreation, park management, outdoor recreation, industrial or commercial recreation, and camp management. It also requires a bachelor's degree or its equivalent in education and work experience, as well as passing a national examination. Ongoing professional education is required for continued certification in both lifesaving techniques and NRPA disciplines.



Additional Requirements

Successful recreation program directors will be knowledgeable about the profession's requirements, responsibilities, and opportunities. High levels of integrity and personal and professional ethics are required of recreation program directors, as professionals in this role interact with staff in subordinate roles and have access to personal information. Membership in professional recreation associations is encouraged among all recreation program directors as a means of building status within a professional community and networking. In most states, the names of those people working in the field of recreation are almost always required to be submitted for a criminal record check. This includes employees, volunteers, and those delivering special programs.

Work Environment

Recreation program directors advance based on their experience. Certification by the National Recreation and Park Association helps advancement. Recreation program directors had mean annual earnings of \$68,261 in 2018.

Recreation program directors may receive paid vacations, holidays, and sick days; life and health insurance; and retirement benefits. These are usually paid by the employer.

Fast Fact

Camp is known to help kids develop confidence, self-esteem, social skills or leadership qualities, and plenty of successful professionals went to camp including Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, and singer Lady Gaga

Source: American Camp Association

EARNINGS AND ADVANCEMENT

Recreation workers, of which recreation program directors are a part, held about 408,300 jobs nationally in 2018. About one-third worked in the park and recreation departments of local governments. About another one-fourth worked in nursing and residential care facilities and civic and social organizations, such as the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts or the YMCA/YWCA. Employment is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through the year 2022, which means employment is projected to increase 8 percent. This is primarily due to people spending more time and money on recreation. However, employment growth may be limited by budget constraints facing State and local governments over the next decade.

Percent change in employment, Projected 2018–28

Personal care and service occupations: 17%

Recreation workers: 8%

Total, all occupations: 5%

Note: All Occupations includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

EMPLOYMENT AND OUTLOOK

Related Occupations

- Fitness Trainer and Aerobics Instructor
- Health Club Manager
- Park Ranger
- Recreation Worker

Related Military Occupations

- Caseworker & Counselor

Conversation With . . . COLLEEN HAGAN EGL

Director
Camp Carysbrook
Riner, Virginia
Camp Director, 7 years

1. What was your individual career path in terms of education/training, entry-level job, or other significant opportunity?

Like many family members going back to my grandmother, I was a camper at Camp Carysbrook and consider it one of the formative experiences of my life. But being a camp director never crossed my mind. Initially, I wanted to do international relations. I went to James Madison University, where I received a B.A. in English and history with a minor in German, and studied abroad, where I met my husband.

I worked in quality assurance at Volvo Penta of the Americas in Chesapeake, Virginia, then went on to work for Sony Digital Telecommunications in Munich for five years.

When we moved back to the U.S. in 2005, I stayed home with my kids. I was a Girl Scout leader and co-manager for the Chatham, New Jersey, service unit, and served on my kids' school's PTO board.

My two daughters followed family tradition and went to Camp Carysbrook, which is a summer girls' camp filled with tradition and history. When the owners initially approached me about the position in 2010, I didn't feel it was something I could consider from New Jersey, where I live. In 2011, circumstances changed and gave me the opportunity to step in at the end of the summer when the new director fell ill. Once I had a taste for it, I was hooked. I started thinking about if I could hire the staff, train them, if I could recruit campers . . . I really fell into it.

I think there's a misconception that this is a part-time job. People always ask: "So what do you do the rest of the year?" I build the summer the rest of the year. We do things like accreditation, attend conferences and American Camping Association (ACA) continuing education programs, or build our alumnae association. Daily updates to social media are important; you need to keep the product in front of people whether it's an alumna, a camper or a parent.

2. What are the most important skills and/or qualities for someone in your profession?

Being a critical thinker and problem solver; being able to understand the big picture and make connections across complex ideas, and excellent communication and listening skills. You need to be a good coach/mentor who can motivate—not just manage. You need to understand and value different points of view, and you must have an understanding of the complexities of the modern world and its effect on young women and the ways we can empower them to develop their unique potential.

Finally, you have to appreciate the outdoors. When I'm outside, my soul is full. Even when I'm in the camp office, I'm outdoors because it's a screened-in structure. I can hear the kids tubing down the river and laughing, I can hear them practicing songs for campfire chorus.

3. What do you wish you had known going into this profession?

I wish I had known how much I would learn and grow, personally and professionally. I probably would have pursued this profession earlier.

And I wish I had known that there will be things that I cannot control, like weather, and things will go wrong, but that will always take a backseat to the broader mission.

4. Are there many job opportunities in your profession? In what specific areas?

There are many job opportunities for camp directors, but the skills required would translate to fields such as education, quality assurance, coaching, and public speaking or consulting.

There are jobs in camp accreditation with the ACA, and speaking opportunities through ACA-related organizations. The camping world is a supportive, tight-knit community.

5. How do you see your profession changing in the next five years, what role will technology play in those changes, and what skills will be required?

Our camp is deliberately technology free, yet the backbone of our administration is online. Our registration system, health records, planning and documents are all online. I believe that as technology races ahead, we need to balance the soft skills needed to be successful while maximizing what technology can do for us to make our lives less complicated. It will continue to be a challenge to maintain a tech-oriented administrative infrastructure with our focus on unplugging and developing interpersonal skills and highlighting the value of those skills.

6. What do you enjoy most about your job? What do you enjoy least about your job?

I enjoy that I am able to connect my sense of purpose with my job and mentor the next generation of women. I enjoy challenging staff and campers to develop their potential in a fun, outdoor environment. I also enjoy developing a relationship of trust with parents/guardians and working together to see their campers succeed.

I dislike the misconception that people outside the industry have that working in camping is not a “real” job. Also, the seasonal nature of the business poses challenges maintaining staff because they seek other opportunities in the offseason. I think of camping as a supplemental arm to the education field and, like education, I wish the pay better reflected the important work we do.

7. Can you suggest a valuable “try this” for students considering a career in your profession?

Start by working as a staff member, such as a counselor or CIT, at a camp and taking advantage of all the training available. Shadow a director for a week both in the off-season and in season. Find a mentor and apply for supervisory roles within camping.

MORE INFORMATION

Many community colleges and four-year colleges and universities offer programs in physical education; a number of them also offer programs in parks and recreation management, arts and crafts management, and related fields. Interested students are advised to consult with a school guidance counselor.

MORE INFORMATION

American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration

P.O. Box 1040
Mahomet, IL 61853
217.586.3360
www.aapra.org

American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance

1900 Association Drive
Reston, VA 20192-1598
800.213.7193
www.aahperd.org

American Camping Association

5000 State Road 67 North
Martinsville, IN 46151
765.342.8456
www.acacamps.org

American Lifeguard Association

8300 Boone Boulevard, 5th Floor
Vienna, VA 22182
703.761.6750
www.americanlifeguard.com

Employee Services Management Association

P.O. Box 10517
Rockville, MD 20849
www.esmassn.org

National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification

7 Elmwood Drive
New City, NY 10956
845.639.1439
nctrc@NCTRC.org
www.nctrc.org

National Recreation and Park Association

22377 Belmont Ridge Road
Ashburn, VA 20148-4501
800.626.6772
www.nrpa.org

Society of State Directors of Health, Physical Educ. & Recreation

1900 Association Drive, Suite 100
Reston, VA 20191-1599
703.390.4599
www.thesociety.org

YMCA of the USA

101 N. Wacker Drive
Chicago, IL 60606
800.872.9622
www.ymca.net