



## APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2016.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

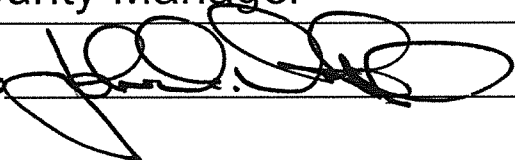
### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Henrico County  
Program Title: Summer Camp Staff Orientation: Creating a Culture of Leadership  
Program Category: Organizational Development

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: John A. Vithoukas  
Title: County Manager  
Signature: 

## **1. Short Overview of the Program**

In 2015, Henrico County's Division of Recreation and Parks collaborated with the Department of Human Resources to revise the orientation for 196 seasonal summer camp employees, with tremendous results. In past years, camp staff was not handling issues at their sites but instead deferred leadership to full time Recreation employees. To combat this pattern, we transformed the former 14-hour lecture-style orientation into a four-day immersion experience, involving staff with core content, leadership expectations, and each other so they could engage over 1,500 children a day in summer camp.

Content focused on camper safety, conflict resolution, leadership, and parent engagement, and reinforced the expectation that summer camp staff needed to take accountability to resolve issues themselves. Employees left the training with a deeper understanding of both content and leadership concepts, and independently applied what they learned throughout the summer. They handled 95% of complaints on-site instead of deferring them to full time staff, and there was an astounding 90% reduction in parent complaints to the Director of Recreation and Parks. Camp employees resolved all internal team conflicts independently, and 94% plan to return to work for the County next summer as a result of their experience.

## **2. Problem/Challenge/Situation**

Between 2012 and 2014, full time Recreation staff recognized that seasonal camp employees appeared disengaged during staff orientation and were ill equipped to handle issues in the field. Summer camp staff is predominantly high school and college-aged students, and for many, this was their first job experience where they were expected to be leaders. Once at their camp sites, many struggled with

interpersonal skills and mutual respect. Instead of independently resolving issues with parents and campers, they relied on full time Recreation staff to deal with conflicts and resolve daily issues. In addition, they lacked a clear understanding of policies and procedures. This resulted in a large time investment from full time Recreation staff, a delay in resolving issues, inconsistency between sites, and parents calling full time Recreation staff – including the Director – to resolve issues.

We needed to transform the camp staff orientation from what had been predominantly dry lecture about policies and procedures to instead include interpersonal skills and leadership expectations; give staff a chance to acquaint themselves with their teams prior to relying on one another in the field; apply policies and procedures independently; and understand program design so they could independently create positive, powerful learning experiences for the campers.

### **3. How the Program Was Carried Out**

One of the largest and most time-intensive efforts of the Recreation and Parks (R&P) program year is coordinating the many summer camps that take place at numerous sites across Henrico County. This is a vital service to our community, many of whom are not able to afford other options for their children during the summer. It is also a very visible program, and reflects our County values and emphasis on excellent customer service in the field.

As a result of a R&P reorganization, two new full time Recreation Coordinators (RCs) were assigned the task of coordinating the Summer Blast and Teen Scene (SB/TS) Summer Camps for 2015. Summer Blast

sites serve up to 1,315 rising first through fifth graders per day at 23 sites, and Teen Scene serves up to 226 rising sixth through eighth graders per day at six different sites, so this was a large and very important undertaking. Summer Blast and Teen Scene seasonal camp staff include such positions as Recreation Helpers, Aides, Instructors, Coordinators, Specialists, and Inclusion Coaches and Specialists. Summer Blast staff is made up of predominantly high school and college-aged students, and both SB and TS staff include teachers and teacher aides, coaches, and retirees.

The RCs analyzed past summer camp successes and identified areas of potential improvement for 2015. Based on incident reports, conversations, and past program evaluations, the RCs determined that summer camp staff needed to be better equipped to independently resolve issues and display the appropriate leadership skills with campers and parents. Henrico's County Manager has a philosophy of "Leadership at all levels" in which all employees are expected to take the initiative to solve problems and proactively serve customers regardless of their hierarchical position, so this expectation of leadership was in line with County core values. In addition, the RCs determined that camp staff needed to understand policies and procedures thoroughly enough to feel comfortable implementing them in the field, they needed to be able to design daily programs for the campers, and they needed to display such interpersonal skills as assertiveness, decision-making, and effective communication.

To address these needs, the RCs collaborated with training experts from the County's Department of Human Resources (HR) and completely redesigned the former 2½-day SB/TS orientation training, which had primarily consisted of lecture on policies and procedures. The RCs met with two of HR's Organizational Learning and Talent Development (OLT) team in January 2015, and together decided

that in order to meet the learning goals, they would need to expand the orientation from 2½ days to four days of immersion. This would allow for increased experiential training, opportunities for dialogue between staff assigned to the same site, and time for applying the content. Together they created a draft outline that included the following elements:

- Ensuring the staff of each camp site remained together throughout the training to allow them to plan together as well as get to know one another before working together in the field.
- Creating concurrent sessions so that the roughly 200 expected camp staff could be divided into smaller groups for more in-depth training.
- The HR Assistant Director delivering the message of Henrico’s expectations of “Leadership at all levels” in an all-staff session so that everyone could hear this important charge at the same time.
- Several opportunities for the staff to work together and develop team leadership and program planning skills using highly interactive, experiential learning techniques.
- Site visits and time to create programs to use at their sites.

Throughout the following months, OLTD staff designed the interpersonal training elements while the RCs developed the content related to policies, working with youth, and program planning. OLTD staff focused on developing experiential activities in which participants would be given challenges to solve by using effective communication and leadership skills, followed by debrief conversations highlighting the lessons learned through their interactions. The RCs developed sessions that allowed for plenty of application and planning time. OLTD staff also trained the RCs on how to lead experiential exercises so that they could teach some of these elements during the orientation. To do so, OLTD staff facilitated a

mini-training with 20 R&P employees to demonstrate how to facilitate this type of learning, and to share some of the specific activities that were later used in the SB/TS orientation.

The “2015 Summer Blast and Teen Scene Leadership Orientation and Training” took place at a Henrico County recreation center on the dates of June 16-19, 2015, and 196 seasonal employees participated. R&P employees taught specific content segments and both the RCs and OLTD staff facilitated experiential learning throughout. Table seating and session rotations were set up so that staff would be with their camp site coworkers throughout the training event, and they were provided with office supplies and planning materials so they could design programs for their camps together. Small group training session rotations of 45 minutes to 1 hour each day included experiential and interactive elements and a consistent emphasis on leadership development, clear and consistent procedures, and dialogue between participants. The schedule also included extended planning sessions, site visits, and all-staff group initiatives, as well as additional specialized training sessions for specific staff groups such as the Recreation Helpers (rising 10th graders) who were experiencing their first job; the Therapeutic Recreation inclusion coaches; the Teen Scene staff; and the Outdoor camp site teams.

Specific elements included:

- A welcome address from the Director of Recreation and Parks followed by an all-staff teambuilding exercise to begin the session with energy and interaction.
- The HR Assistant Director sharing the County Manager’s vision of “leadership at all levels” with the whole staff and facilitating dialog around this concept.
- Concurrent sessions running throughout all four days in the following topic areas:

- Leadership expectations, experiential activities emphasizing leadership, and facilitated discussions about the importance of taking personal ownership and living the “leadership at all levels” philosophy.
- Instruction on mental health, bullying, and children’s personal identity/boundaries.
- Childhood development principles and how to empower youth, with ample time for discussion and experiential activities.
- Understanding and applying policies and procedures, personnel standards, inclusion, safety and security, and behavior modification.
- Instruction on developing effective teams, followed by an experiential challenge to reinforce the concepts of interpersonal communication and personal responsibility. Sites together defined their roles, strengths, and their expectations of one another.
- A half-day, focused experiential training for Recreation Helpers with the goal of empowering these young people to see themselves as part of the camp leadership rather than as passive helpers awaiting direction from others.
- Focused, participatory sessions for Teen Scene staff, focusing on leadership and program planning.
- Ample time for program planning and site visits, giving staff time to create their lesson plans and compile materials for their camps

After completion of the summer camp programs, the OLTD trainers and RCs met to analyze the effectiveness of the orientation program and determine whether it met the goals of empowering staff to apply leadership concepts. We determined that:

- The experiential and interactive elements of the training fully engaged participants in the content. Staff actively practiced the concept of “leadership at all levels” and independent problem solving skills were evident throughout the summer.
- Camp site teams’ opportunity to engage with each other all week in a variety of settings promoted a better understanding of coworkers’ personalities and communication styles before the first camper arrived.
- The extended training event provided more opportunity for dialogue, questions, and sharing past camp situations and lessons learned. Hearing the stories of actual incidents and resolutions was very helpful for new staff. Policies and procedures were connected to actual events and thus more readily understood.

The impact of the collaboration between R&P and HR was core to being able to deliver the orientation and meet the goals of the program effectively. Participants left the orientation more fully engaged with their coworkers, better prepared to deal with incidents at their camp sites, more excited and animated, and with a greater understanding of “leadership at all levels.”

#### **4. Financing and Staffing**

Minimum cost was incurred to draft and complete the orientation program for SB/TS. Training and program designers were salaried and the use of hourly/temporary employees was limited to an as needed basis, which in this instance was nominal. Facility costs were nonexistent due to program development and implementation being handled internally. Recreation and Parks owns the recreation center where the training took place, and there was no charge to utilize it. Material costs, such as



supplemental supplies for program development and planning, totaled \$439.78. The majority of the materials purchased will be able to be used each year. The maintenance costs of ongoing program administration are minimal as well, utilizing existing salaried employees.

## 5. Program Results

**Training evaluations for the orientation reflected a 90% approval rate**, and written comments highlighted the improvement in content, emphasis, and format:

- “It is always good to know what the organization’s expectations are so that when situations arise you know how to address them.”
- “This year was a huge improvement over previous trainings.”
- “The training was a great way to get to know your team and cover important information. It was a helpful week!”
- Most helpful part of the training: “The time we got to spend meeting and learning about the people we were going to work with all summer.”

**Parents noticed a difference in the performance of the summer camp staff.** In parent evaluations conducted at the end of the summer, 94% of parents stated that they would register their child for the 2016 camps.

- “Our daughter went to numerous sites... All sites were fantastic, staff was engaging and friendly. She had a great time!”
- “The staff this year was a VAST improvement over last year's.”

- “This year was my son's second and my daughter's fifth time attending Henrico Summer Blast program and this year was BY FAR their best experience!
- “I love the Henrico camps, and was glad there was easier communication (this year)... 2014 camp went horribly for us and I was so scared for this year but the kids had fun.”
- I... felt like (camp) was run better than any of the previous years that we have attended (we have been enrolled for 7 years now at this same location). The atmosphere was one of respect and fun, without being crazy or out of control.”
- “This year, the camp was well organized and well run. I felt like the counselors were respectful and engaging.”

**Camp staff were more empowered to take charge**, and were better equipped to handle issues knowing that they would be supported by the organization’s administrative leadership.

- There was a 90% reduction in the number of parent complaints to the Recreation and Parks Director, Assistant Director, and Recreation Managers.
- Camp staff handled 95% of participant and parent complaints and incidents on-site, which resulted in a reduction in the number of incidents handled by the full-time program coordinators.
- Camp staff resolved all internal team conflicts without the intervention of full-time Recreation staff. This is unprecedented in the SB/TS camp program.

**Staff surveys conducted at the end of summer camp revealed that 94% of summer camp staff would like to return in 2016.** As of March 2016, there is a 15% increase from 2014 in the number of staff confirming their intent to return.

**Finally, the camps received accolades** from both R&P and HR top leadership. The Assistant Director of Human Resources wrote a letter to the employees who designed the transformed orientation program noting the impact of sharing the county's expectation of "Leadership at all levels." The Recreation and Parks Director found the redesigned orientation to be so powerful that he requested that some elements be consolidated to include several additional camp programs (such as history, preschool, outdoor adventure camps) in 2016.

## **6. Brief Summary**

Summer camp is an important time in young people's lives – both for the campers and the camp staff. For the children attending Henrico County summer camps, it is imperative that the experience focuses on development and learning rather than being simply a place to "drop the kids while school is out." For the camp staff, it is a unique opportunity to develop independent problem solving and leadership skills. And for Henrico County, it is an opportunity to support our community with high quality programming that is consistent across all our demographics and income levels. In addition, our County Manager has a firm philosophy of "leadership at all levels," expecting all employees – including seasonal summer camp staff – to take initiative to resolve issues at their own levels and accept personal accountability for giving the best possible customer service to our residents.

In 2015, Henrico County's Division of Recreation and Parks collaborated with the Department of Human Resources to revise the orientation for 196 seasonal summer camp employees, with tremendous results. In past years, camp staff was not handling issues at their sites but instead deferred leadership to full time Recreation employees. To combat this pattern, we transformed the former 14-hour lecture-style orientation into a four-day immersion experience, involving staff with core content, leadership expectations, and each other so they could engage over 1,500 children a day in summer camp.

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The redesigned orientation training instilled in our camp staff an understanding of effective program design, ownership of important policies, and an increased expectation of interpersonal communication and leadership skills. As a result, campers across our County had a positive learning experience, and parents noticed. This also created a ripple effect for R&P's full time staff, who were able to focus on proactive support instead of "putting out fires" that camp staff were unable to resolve. The young people working for Henrico on a seasonal basis were supported and given the skills they needed to

succeed, and many plan to come back to work at camps in subsequent summers – and perhaps even apply to full time jobs with the County in the future – creating a powerful win-win for everyone involved. The program clearly demonstrated that making an effort up front to create the right culture pays huge dividends for everyone involved in the end.