



Leading Summer Learning Programs

Tips to Recruit and Select Seasonal Staff

Recruiting, selecting, and retaining staff is always a challenge for summer programs. Staff may only be on board for a short time, which can make it difficult to create a strong staff culture and enable them to meet high expectations. Nevertheless, summer presents opportunities to reach out to seasonal staff members who can enrich your program by offering unique talents, experience, and knowledge.

The National Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University interviewed outstanding summer programs to find out what they do to select quality staff for summer programs.

Contributors include:

- Karen West, Director of Redhound Enrichment, Corbin, KY
- Pamela DiPasquale, Education Director for the Shakespeare Youth Academy, Louisville, KY
- Barry Sims, Director of Curriculum and Development for Oasis Children's Services, New York, NY
- Tobi Swartz, Director of Bridges to a Brighter Future, Furman University, Greenville, SC

This tip sheet will offer advice from these high-quality programs and help you to find the right summer staff for your program.



How do I recruit seasonal staff?

When recruiting staff, it helps to clearly ask yourself what positions are open; what skills and knowledge staff members need to do the job effectively; and what are the expected responsibilities of each position. Think of the best possible person you would want to fill that job, and brainstorm the desired characteristics.

For example, if you need a health and fitness specialist, be specific!

- **Poor Example:**
Summer program is looking for seasonal staff for a six-week summer program.
- **Good Example:**
Summer program is looking for someone who loves sports and staying active, with high levels of energy and the ability to work with both small and large groups of young people (be specific about the age of youth) to facilitate health and fitness activities in a six-week summer program. Prior experience and a related degree preferred.

Online recruitment tools:

The following are online recruitment tools that you can utilize to find summer staff. Note that some may charge a fee to post your advertisement.

- www.volunteermatch.org
- www.idealists.org \$
- www.summerjobs.com \$
- www.acacamps.org/jobs \$
- www.coolworks.com
- www.craigslist.org

Dollar signs indicate a charge.

Additional Resources:

The following links provide a wealth of resources around issues in the field of out-of-school time and specific research and best practices concerning seasonal staff.

- Afterschool Alliance
www.afterschoolalliance.org
- Bridges to a Brighter Future
www.furman.edu/bridges
- Child Trends
www.childtrends.org
- Harvard Family Research Project
www.hfrp.org
- National Center for Summer Learning
www.summerlearning.org
- National Training Institute for Community Youth Work
<http://www.nti.aed.org>
- Oasis Children's Services
www.oasischildren.com
- Public / Private Ventures
www.ppv.org
- Redhound Enrichment
www.redhoundproductions.com/enrichment.html
- Shakespeare Youth Academy
www.kyshakes.org



School of Education

Where do I find excellent summer staff?

High-quality summer programs have a staffing plan and typically begin their staff recruitment process at least six months in advance.

Start your search early to recruit top talent.

Sources for seasonal employees include:

- Local High Schools – Consider working with the school’s guidance counselor or athletic director to help you identify quality students to recruit as summer program employees. Tap into workforce investment dollars to support the employment of high school staff.
- Program Participants – Grow your own staff by developing a counselor-in-training program or apprenticeships within your program. Former program participants understand the program’s culture and expectations and can be a valuable team asset.
- Colleges and Universities – Get connected to colleges and universities through the work study or student life offices to promote your program and conduct on-site, preliminary interviews. Establish an internship for college students, enabling them to work in your summer program. You can also contact the financial aid office staff, who often know about work-study dollars or other funding that can support college students’ work with youth in the summer. Some suggested initiatives include America Reads and America Counts.
- AmeriCorps Members – AmeriCorps is a national organization that matches interested people with opportunities to serve their communities and provides incentives such as living allowances or educational awards. Applying to be an AmeriCorps program is a rigorous process, so you may want to find a community partner who has open AmeriCorps slots that they could share with your program. AmeriCorps – www.americorps.gov



- Retirees – Although not all summer staff positions are appropriate for retirees, summer programming can be a great opportunity to recruit those in retirement. Consider their past careers and how that experience could add balance to your financial situation, or support instruction and staff development. Check with your local Experience Corps chapter (www.experiencecorps.org), church groups, or senior centers to find retirees.
- Substitute Teachers – Connect with the human resources department in your local school district to tap into the list of substitutes employed in your area. Many times, this group of professionals is looking for ways to gain more experience or permanent employment. Your summer program could be the opportunity they need to learn more about area youth and continue to build their skills.

Some Real-World Examples

- Redhound Enrichment uses teacher’s aides and media aides from the local school district, as well as education majors from local colleges with two years completed “because they have good training and enthusiasm for the job,” says Director Karen West. “Plus many are looking for experience.”
- Oasis Children’s Services looks to their current summer employees to recruit staff and encourages them to bring friends during staff reunions.

How do I interview seasonal staff?

An interview provides an opportunity to determine whether the applicant is a good match for your program. Be sure to provide clear information about the program, staff expectations, and job roles.

During the interview process, consider situational questions where interviewees will have to give details as to how they might handle the situation. This exchange helps reveal how applicants might interact with kids and shows the thought processes behind their decision-making, says Pam DiPasquale, education director for the Shakespeare Youth Academy in Louisville, Kentucky. “For example, do they ask questions? The questions they ask often reveal more about their experience and knowledge.”

Sample situational interview questions:

- You are leading a small group discussion about _____ when you see that two other children not in the small group are arguing. Two seconds later, another child begins choking. What is your course of action?

- While leading a whole group discussion, you notice that one child has not made eye contact with anyone and has not spoken since the beginning of the group discussion. How would you engage that child in the conversation?
- During the art activity, one child spills paint on the floor, just as a parent comes in and would like to talk to you. How would you react?
- While playing with the group of children, you notice that a parent who is not allowed contact with their child has arrived at the playground. What do you do?
- This summer, you will receive a lot of formal and informal feedback to support your experience. Please describe a situation where you received constructive criticism. How did you handle it? How, if at all, did you incorporate the feedback?



How do I determine staff wages?

Staff wages are often a significant portion of the program budget. High-quality programs make staff wages a priority, resulting in low staff turnover and quality summer programming.

At the Redhound Enrichment program, Director Karen West investigates and bases her staff salaries on what other employers offer during the summer. Other methods include:

- Setting a base salary and offering increases based on years of service
- Having a pay increase after a certain time period or evaluation
- Setting a tiered pay scale based on responsibilities

What incentives can I use for maintaining seasonal summer staff?

Many times, summer program providers see a wave of enthusiasm during the course of a summer. Enthusiasm is high at the start, drops off at the midpoint, and then soars again when the end is in sight. To help keep enthusiasm high, Barry Sims at Oasis Children’s Services supplies each site director with various \$5 gift cards—for coffee shops, movie passes, music downloads, and even metro cards—to distribute to their summer staff. “Site directors use these gift cards to acknowledge a staff member who goes beyond the call of duty,” he says. Consider these incentives when drafting the budget for your program.

Incentives for Seasonal Summer Staff:

- Special midpoint breakfast, lunch, or ice cream break
- Messages with specific, positive feedback – “I like the way you encouraged Sarah to lead the group during recreation today!”
- Sponsored trips or outings
- End of program monetary bonuses
- More paid planning time
- Opportunities for leadership
- Opportunities to provide feedback to influence program improvement
- Youth-generated thank you notes or recognition from program participants

Programs we interviewed had a range of salaries for their summer staff.

- High School Students: \$5.75 - \$10.00 per hour
- College Students: \$9.50 - \$18.00 per hour
Consider offering room and meals to draw college students.
- Certified Teachers: \$25.00 - \$35.00 per hour
- Specialists (artists, musicians):
\$35 to \$70 per hour based on experience and seniority