

# CAMP STABILIZATION TOOLKIT

## Overview

Your camp may be facing a major period of financial stress and uncertainty. You likely spend nearly the entire year preparing for the summer season, and disruption in revenue at any point in the planning can have a lasting and disastrous impact. Fundraising may be impacted for many months, and your camper families may find it difficult to pay fees.

Relief is needed to overcome sharp losses and steady this period of upheaval. You need to establish a reliable revenue source to prevent disruption to the following camp season. With your revenue severely disrupted, perhaps from spring and fall operations as well as summer, relief is needed to get through the rest of the year.

You should already be looking for longer-term recovery support to improve your business outlook and output and open planning and operating schedules in the fall. Preparation means projecting and adjusting budgets for the next year and looking at fixed and variable costs. No one knows what the weather, business climate and other factors that impact camp operations will be in the future, so building in contingency plans is vital. You may find it necessary to provide educational information about your camp's unique business cycle to state and local officials who are tasked with decision-making around establishing guidelines that impact camps.

## Resources for Federal, State, and Local Funding and Advocacy

This document offers resources for state and local funding and advocacy, as well as general guidance for contingency planning. Additional resources that support camp business operations can be found on the American Camp Association (ACA) website Core Competency Toolkits page: [ACAcamps.org/resources/core-competency-toolkits](https://www.acacamps.org/resources/core-competency-toolkits)

- [Contingency Planning Framework](#)
- [Buckets to Explore: A Six-Step Approach to Bridging Your Business to 2025](#)
- [Economic Injury Disaster Loans \(EIDL\)](#)
- [Small Business resources from the National Federation of Independent Business](#)
- Also be aware of other national information sources such as:
  - [Small Business Administration Disaster Relief Loans](#)
  - [The Grantsmanship Center](#)
  - [National Council of Nonprofits](#)

Often federal money is accessed directly through your banking institution or a federal agency. Sometimes that money is directed to a state, and access to the funds is through the state.

This resource is designed to help you search, advocate, and access potential financial support by:

- Monitoring and advocating for state legislation that includes relief that could help camps in the form of grants, loans, tax relief, etc.
- Monitoring and advocating for any kind of financial relief that might come from the Governor's offices through executive orders
- Gathering information about positive happenings in other states and jurisdictions that could be introduced in your state
- Positioning camp for a seat at the table in decisions affecting camp operations

### This resource contains:

1. **A Discussion of Potential Solutions**
2. **Guide to Monitoring Other Jurisdictions and Organizations**
3. **Using Social Media to Help Position Camp**
4. **Developing Local Data Resources**
5. **Addendum**
  - General Advocacy Hints for Camp
  - Templates for educating public officials about camp and the current situation (sample document that can be personalized with local data to present to decision-makers for use by individual camps or local advocacy teams)



# A DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS



## Do Your Homework

In making decisions about potential funding solutions, research the types of funding and their impact on your camp. Whether looking at existing funding streams, working to access money allocated but not disbursed, or attempting to identify and secure new solutions, consider what is unique about your business model and operation.

Common state-focused funding available is:

- [Federal grants](#)
- State-level loans or grants
- Grants through the [Administration for Children & Families](#)
- Other special funding in your state

**Be creative in searching for information.** Watch for funds in your state/county directed to specific agencies/departments for disbursement.

- Children, youth, and families
- Education
- Health services
- Outdoors
- Community development
- Parks and recreation

Always look for anything specific to camp, but also seek funds directed to related fields. For example:

- Small business
- Environmental education
- Education utilizing outdoor space
- Lunch/food programs
- STEM
- Physical fitness
- Special needs populations
- Childcare (be careful and research any specific requirements if your camp is not regulated by the childcare agency in your state or you have not been designated an essential childcare provider)

# A DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

**There are common questions you might ask about potential funding.** These same questions could apply to advocacy for new ideas. How could access be designed to include camps? Advocate for what is going to help the most. Consider what would happen if you were unable to open due to a public health emergency, damage from a natural disaster, or other unexpected circumstances. Is there protection or consideration built into the funding for such an occurrence?

## Loans/grants

- Does your camp or business meet the requirements and priorities governing this funding source?
  - Is there a staffing minimum or maximum?
  - Is there a revenue/asset limit?
  - Is there a seasonal component or would your seasonal situation cause undue pressure?
  - Is there a location requirement?
  - Is there an incorporation status designation such as for-profit vs. nonprofit?
  - Is it a loan or grant or both, and is the trigger a reasonable condition to meet for your camp?
- Is the lending interest rate workable for your operation?
- Are funding priorities of the funding source a match for your operation?
- Is the range of funding amounts applicable to your operation?
- What are both the short- and long-term impacts of accepting this funding source?
- Does any of your current funding disqualify you from consideration?
- Does this source have a specific target (could be program subject, demographic, etc.) and does your program meet it?
- Are you required to provide matching funds?
- Would this source fund an existing program or would you be required to adapt it or design something new?
- Can the funds only be applied to certain parts of your operation such as salaries, equipment, capital projects, etc.?

## Tax relief/tax credits

- Does your incorporation status affect the potential relief?
- Who gets the relief — employer, employee, camper families, others?
- Does the timing of the relief fill your need?
- How does that relief impact your bottom line?
- Does the proposed relief allow your new/existing expenditures to qualify?

Monitoring what is happening in your state as well as other jurisdictions is an important part of this advocacy. Information changes rapidly, and funds may be distributed quickly. Monitoring, collecting information, and finding a way to disseminate it is vital.

If you need to consider advocacy action, check “Advocacy Hints for Camps” in this resource’s addendum, which includes information on the use of VoterVoice. Working with others is always the best approach, so reach out to your colleagues. A strong, consolidated message gets more attention. Establishing relationships with government officials, funders, and related organizations is essential to success. ACA regularly connects with and supports state camp associations, offering resources and information—particularly in times of crisis. These collaborative efforts strengthen the field’s collective response and ensure consistent communication around relief and recovery solutions.

## Related Issues to Watch

- Insurance relief — watch for potential legislative and/or regulatory action that could impact camps
  - Business interruption insurance current status/cost of policies and exemption clauses
  - Business liability insurance
  - Workers compensation insurance

# MONITORING OTHER JURISDICTIONS

What is happening with camp funding in other parts of the country? There is a need for a broad collection and sharing of information about funding sources, uses of federal and state funds, legislative approaches, coalitions, and much more. One way to gather this information is to establish and maintain contact with a network of other camp-related organizations to share information about funding solutions and action. Collective advocacy is always the best approach, so reaching out to others will also strengthen your influence.

Some groups have started to create databases to collect and monitor information and make that information available to larger audiences. Databases could be posted and even set up to allow multiple contributors. Requirements and contact information for funding sources could be listed. Potential legislative and regulatory solutions could be included with any needed advocacy.

Information gathering might include:

- Overview of purpose including scope and eligibility
- Summary of provisions
- Status
- Sponsors, sponsoring organizations, and contact information
- Action timeline (kept up to date)
- Support and/or oppose position statements or list of points
- Name of contributor and date of posting

Networking organizations could include groups such as the following. **This list is not complete but includes suggestions to help you get started.** Also consider networking with other organizations in related fields such as parks and recreation, education, and childcare.

## Independent Camp Associations

- [Camp Owners and Directors Association \(CODA\)](#)
- [Midwest Association of Independent Camps](#)
- [Western Association of Independent Camps \(WAIC\)](#)

## State Camp Associations (independent organizations separate from ACA)

- Colorado Camps Network
- [Connecticut Camping Association](#)
- [Maine Youth Camping Foundation](#)
- [Massachusetts Camping Association](#)
- [New Hampshire Camp Directors Association](#)
- [New York State Camp Directors Association](#)
- [North Carolina Youth Camp Association](#)
- [Camping Association for Mutual Progress \(Texas\)](#)
- [Vermont Camp Association](#)

## Faith-based groups

- Christian Camp and Conference Association (CCCA)
- Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC)
- Catholic Youth Organization (CYO)
- The Salvation Army
- Episcopal Camp and Conference Centers
- Presbyterian Church Camp and Conference Association
- United Methodist Camp and Retreat Ministries

## Nonprofit groups

- YMCA
- Jewish Community Center Association of North America
- Girl Scouts of the USA
- Scouting America
- 4-H
- Camp Fire
- Boys & Girls Clubs of America

## Coalitions focused on camp, outdoor education, youth development, etc.

- California Collaboration for Youth
- Ten Strands (CA)

# USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO HELP POSITION CAMP

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Sharing information about the benefits of camp as well as the economic impact of your current situation can be very useful. Sharing content online on a regular basis will increase the reach of our collective camp messaging and help inform decision makers about your work and your needs. Post 2–3 times weekly or more on your social media accounts.

The focus should be on positive press. Use your platforms to subtly get your message across **about the impact of camp and the need for funding to continue your work**. You can show an urgent need while still communicating a positive message. Don't focus on what went wrong. Focus on what was still OK and why it could be better in the future. Talk about:

- The benefits of attending camp, whether you operated a core program this summer or not
- Your summer and focus on what you learned
- Looking to your future, including any programs you are offering
- What your campers most enjoyed this summer
- What your campers most missed this summer and why you want to provide it in the future
- Your biggest surprises from this summer

## Make use of:

- Data
- Photos
- Videos
- Stories
- Testimonials from campers, parents, staff, alumni

## Common platforms:

- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Instagram
- Twitter
- Pinterest

## Create a hashtag

Consider creating a common hashtag with other camps in your area.

- Support a cause — funding and camp.
- Help track your impact.
- Limit the number of hashtags you use — too many make it cluttered and spammy.
- Be sure your accounts are public, or they won't be seen by non-followers.

## Create a blog

Blogging has quickly become one of the most popular ways of communicating and spreading information. A blog can provide more detailed thoughts as well as testimonials. Promote your blog using teasers on social media.

**BE CREATIVE AND BE POSITIVE!**

# DEVELOPING LOCAL DATA RESOURCES

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## Statewide Profile of Camp

Some of this information is available in [2024 ACA National Economic Impact Study of the Camp Industry](#) or can be extrapolated from ACA research — [ACAcamps.org/research](https://www.acacamps.org/research)

- How many camps within your state — even a subset number is helpful, such as number of ACA-accredited camps
- Percentage of day vs. overnight camps, independent vs. agency camps, etc.
- Number of campers served
- Economic impact information specific to your state

## Impact Scope

### Impact of the overall camp industry

- The US camp industry contributes \$70 billion to the national economy.
- There are 20,000 camps in the US including both day and overnight programs.
- Each year more than 26 million children, youth, and adults attend camp in the US, approximately half of all school-age children.
- Each year camps provide nearly 1 million jobs and drive \$23 billion in labor income.
- Overnight camps serve as one of the most important economic drivers in rural regional communities.
- Camps play a critical role in the school-aged care landscape that provides support for families with parents who work outside the home.

### Overview of the overall impact on your camp

- How many individuals, mostly youth, were not served
- Amount lost in direct revenue
- Approximately number of camp jobs lost
- Approximate indirect economic benefit to businesses and communities lost due to your camp's situation

### State Impact

- List any special conditions in your state that contributed to your economic situation.

### Your camp's story

- Clientele description
- Number of campers/groups usually served
- Number of campers/groups not served due to your situation
- Revenue impact
- Budget impact
- Impact on future operation

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# DEVELOPING LOCAL DATA RESOURCES

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## Data Collection

If you don't have recent data on the conditions in your state/local area, consider doing a quick online survey with camps. Working in partnership with related camp organizations will increase the scope.

Sample Questions/Concepts for Local Camp Surveys

### Basic Information

- Location (often easiest by zip code): camp, headquarters
- Current status:
  - Open
  - Open with variation
  - Remote/virtual
  - Other alternatives (explain)
  - Suspended
- Programming: number of persons served in current year, previous year
- Staff:
  - Staff full-time equivalents current year, previous year
  - Staff seasonal full-time equivalents current year, previous year
- Gross revenues:
  - Anticipated increase or percent decrease compared to previous year
  - Previous year's gross revenue

### Supplemental Information

You could add many other questions when talking about a more robust Economic Impact Survey. It depends on the depth of information you want to share and your resources. Examples:

- Funding
  - What relief attempts have been undertaken?
  - What relief help would be most beneficial (short-term cash flow)?
  - What help would be most beneficial for longer-term recovery?
  - What relief would support camp reopening (debris removal, HVAC upgrades, facility repair/replacement, etc.)?
- Local impact
  - Payment in property taxes
  - Estimated expenditures directed toward local business (food suppliers, fuel, contractors, and hardware and building suppliers)
  - Identification of local products and services your camp utilizes
  - Number of seasonal and full-time workers who come from your local community
  - Amount of payroll attributable to local employees
- Extended impact on tourism
  - Number of families you bring into the region on visitors' days, arrivals, and departures
  - Number of out-of-area employees you bring into the community for the summer

# ADDENDUM

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## ADVOCACY HINTS FOR CAMPS

### Gathering Information

- Learn how your legislature works and how a bill becomes law.
- Learn about the agencies that impact camp operations.
- Learn about agencies that support business.
- Learn about groups that support youth, the environment, education, and special program focuses you provide.
- Talk to everyone you can.

### Identifying Friends

- Inventory other camp-related groups already working in this area in your state, such as CODA, WAIC, CCCA, YMCA, Girl Scouts of the USA, state associations, other national or regional groups.
- Identify camp friends in decision-making/important roles — support camp, have gone to camp, send their kids to camp:
  - State and local legislators and staff
  - Business leaders
  - Foundation staff
  - Youth and outdoor advocates
  - Celebrities
  - Others
- Form relationships with agencies impacting camp — think out of the box on who they might be, like the Small Business Administration or labor-related groups.

### Working with Committees and Coalitions

- What groups are making the news and why?
- Who shares the same mission? Seek people who work in the outdoors, youth development, mental health, physical fitness, etc.
- What messages are you seeing that could be adapted to include camp or a special focus you provide through your demographics, program activities, unique contribution to your community, etc.?

### Monitoring Possible Solutions

- Watch for the introduction of bills in your local legislature and other state legislatures, as well as federally. Sometimes what's happening in another part of the country can provide ideas and models.
- Monitor funding sources; look for key words that may apply to your situation.



# ADDENDUM

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## ADVOCACY HINTS FOR CAMPS

### Using Research

Research can document that camp is a positive force in youth development with lasting impact on both campers and staff, as well as present economic impact camp has on the community. Learn more about research on the ACA research page — [ACAcamps.org/research](https://ACAcamps.org/research)

- [2024 ACA National Economic Impact Study of the Camp Industry](#)
- Cite youth development research data.
- Tell the impact story — economic, camper participation rates, number of jobs, etc.
- Use statistics creatively, but be factual.
- Add the specific impact on your camp.

### Designing Talking Points

- Talking points are a set of clear, easily remembered phrases that outline a proposal, project, or idea.
- They are simple but not superficial.
- Talking points should:
  - Be designed to reflect the intended audience
  - Identify your mission or message
  - Outline two to three points
  - Provide specific examples
  - Emphasize a win-win solution
  - End with a call to action
  - Provide contact information, if applicable

### Voter Voice

[Voter Voice](#) is a direct advocacy tool for grass roots advocacy campaigns. To use this tool, work with your ACA staff member.

- Tool for personal call to action
- Use as part of a total campaign
- Know your overall campaign goal
- Know the specific goals for Voter Voice actions
- Can be set as wide or as narrow in scope as you need
- Uses a prewritten message
- Automatically matches advocates to legislators by address/zip code
- Links to call-to-action messages and background information that may include other options