

A SIX-STEP APPROACH TO BRIDGING YOUR BUSINESS PLAN: *BUCKETS TO EXPLORE*

Sterling Nell Leija, Tony Stein, and Meena Julapalli

This document is intended to support camps in developing their bridge through the creation of a 12- to 18-month business continuity plan. Examples of why you would need to bridge: disaster at camp, fire, hurricane, flood, legal issue, encroachment by other development, lack of funding from parent organization, and/or communicable disease. ***This is an overview to connect a camp's short-term, crisis-critical decisions to the long-term success of the organization.*** Updated July 2025

1. Develop Your Decision-Making Strategy — *Prioritize defining your organization's decision-making process.*

- Describe, in one sentence, what “camp success” means to you. Now, keep that lens in mind as you move forward in your evaluation process. Ask yourself if that definition only works for your existing camp or if you have an opportunity to expand your definition of success.
- Who will serve on the decision-making team? Who has ultimate authority?
- Who are the stakeholders you must include during this process?
- What are the safety considerations relevant to your camp?
- What is the appropriate timing for making decisions?
- Who can help you make informed decisions? Reach out to trusted partners: insurance agent, attorney, board of directors, communication/PR specialists, bankers, medical advisors, and more.

2. Maintain and Grow Your Community — *Camps are built on the idea of community. How you maintain your community, continue engagement, sustain relationships, and maintain connections is a vital part of contingency planning. If your summer is partially or fully compromised, you may want to consider each existing camper, parent/guardian, staff member, volunteer, and donor as a prospect. Do not take anyone for granted.*

- Take stock in what moves and activates your community. Use this as a baseline during your evaluation process.
- Lean on your camp community to keep them engaged.
 - Stay relevant to your community.
 - Remain top of mind to stakeholders, including your camper families.
 - Remember that camper, staff, and volunteer recruitment never end.
 - Philanthropy grows during difficult times — how can your community support your camp's sustainability?
 - Assess who your ambassadors may be — people who will help spread the word about new approaches to camp this summer and encourage others to come back next summer. These may be local camp families, volunteers, staff, donors, or community members.
 - Stay connected with your community so they know what is going on. Regular, thoughtful communication can go a long way to maintain relationships and trust.

[Learn more about crisis communication here.](#)
[Message Manual for Camps: Responding to Tragedy Thoughtfully and Reassuringly](#)
- Assess alternative programming options:
 - Host reunions.
 - Send newsletters.
 - Explore virtual or online options.
 - Reduce group size.
 - Adjust your calendar.
 - Offer/expand family programs, bringing camp to your camp families through in-town reunions.
 - Change/modify activities offered to support health practices.
 - Look for new partnering opportunities, including out-of-school time programs, educators, etc.
- Research promising practices around new safety and risk considerations (i.e., online child safety, equipment needs).
 - Consider involving professional subject matter experts.
 - Invite leadership from government agencies to collaborate on new approaches.
 - Partner with organizations or companies that offer expertise in their field.
 - Explore partnerships with universities for fresh thinking and access to research.
- Assess unique opportunities for growth.
 - Alternative programming may allow for camp community growth.
 - New programming may allow for an increased number of touchpoints throughout the year or increased camper numbers by program.
 - Virtual camp may reduce some barriers and open doors for new campers.
 - Explore funding opportunities to include new communities of campers who historically have been missed out on camp.
 - Consider new partnerships with like-minded organizations or entities connected to you and those you serve.
- Develop a transition plan — assess sustainability of alternative programming options.
 - What is the phase-out strategy?
 - How do you track the current needs of your community?
 - How will you track engagement?
 - Consider short- and long-term impacts.

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3. Ensure Coordination and Collaboration — *You are not alone. You are a part of a community that excels in togetherness, idea sharing, and partnership. Begin to prepare and plan. Be able to rely on your bridge in times of trouble. Make sure to update policies and procedures.*

- Coordinate and collaborate with experts to make sure you receive the most up-to-date information and to ensure you have a seat at the table. Organizations to follow:
 - Regulatory agencies
 - State and county resources
 - American Camp Association
 - Local healthcare providers
 - Affiliated organizations
- Lean on your current policies and procedures while developing a process to update standard operating procedures and best practices as resources become available.
- Involve stakeholders where appropriate to assess their highest needs, priorities, and concerns. This involvement will support strengthening your community in addition to informing decisions. Stakeholders may be leveraged as collaborative partners.
- Engage with peers within the camp community who are facing similar challenges and opportunities.
- Invest in professional development to challenge assumptions, evaluate practices, and create space for innovative thinking.
- Consider ACA accreditation as a structured approach to thoughtful assessment, ongoing education, and meaningful peer review.

4. Prioritize Financial Planning and Sustainability — *Assess finances and develop options for sustaining your organization financially through the summer and beyond.*

- Assess financial strength, liquidity, and reserves.
- Look into loan, assistance, and grant options.
- Partner with your insurance agent.
- Assess income/revenue sources — fees, funders, donors, rentals.
- Find a balance between the organization's short-term cash flow needs and long-term relationship needs with camp families. Maximize refund policies and create multiple options to support families as they manage their own crises. This family support will help build sustainable relationships with families.
- Explore alternative revenue options.
- Create a contingency budget process — assess new revenue and current expense projections.
- Explore possible partnership(s) with like-minded organizations where sharing resources can reduce overhead and/or more efficiently serve your stakeholders.
- Philanthropy often grows during difficult times; ask funders and stakeholders to support camp's sustainability.
- Assign one person to oversee and organize donations and volunteer requests.

BUCKETS TO EXPLORE: A SIX-STEP APPROACH TO BRIDGING YOUR BUSINESS

5. Address Psychological Impact and Care Plan — *Camps play an important role in the emotional and physical development of people. Consider the psychological state of stakeholders, from campers to donors, and develop an intentional plan to steward and support them through thoughtful mission-focused care.*

In times of crisis, it is essential to care for both your own emotional needs and those of your camp community. When people feel emotionally supported, they are better able to think clearly, adapt, and recover from hardship. Caring for yourself and your team also enables you to better support others. Ignoring emotional needs can lead to increased stress, while addressing them early can help prevent deeper trauma.

- What is the psychological state of stakeholders?
 - Who is your audience?
 - Campers
 - Camper parents/families/caregivers
 - Year-round staff
 - Seasonal staff
 - Volunteers
 - Donors
 - Vendors
 - Community members
 - Partnering organizations
 - You
 - What are each audience's needs?
 - How may those needs evolve over time? How will you continue to evaluate those needs?
- Normalize conversations about mental health — begin by acknowledging the loss and the challenge your camp is facing.
- Define your camp's role in addressing psychological needs and future healing. Assess local mental health resources to support your camp's community.
- Recognize that stakeholders will need time to grieve the loss of camp if programs are canceled or modified. People love camp, and change is hard. Be attentive to their need to grieve the loss and provide support through this process.
- Create regular check-ins through buddy systems in addition to supervisor check-ins.
- Remind staff of any existing employee assistance programs.
- Ensure staff understand their health benefits related to mental health.
- Partner with local mental health professionals to debrief events.
- Share free resources such as hotlines.
- Encourage boundaries and time off.
- Offer flexible work hours or job responsibilities to address changing needs during a crisis.
- Celebrate small wins.
- Ask for help — consider who in your community can provide professional support, or make introductions to those who can offer additional help.
- Assess your community's future mental health needs as camp returns to "normal."

6. Develop a Communication and Marketing Plan — *Lead with your mission. Always.*

Speak from the position that you are building a bridge to the future and beyond for, and with, your community.

- Questions to think about as you develop a communication strategy: Who are you going to communicate with?
 - When and how frequently will you communicate?
 - What is your goal, message, or reason?
 - What methods will be most effective for communication?
 - Do you need different messages for each audience?
- Continuously maintain engagement with your stakeholders. Proactively engage and communicate to ensure continued commitment over the next 12 to 18 months.
- Create continuous touchpoints for campers, seasonal staff, and volunteers. Never stop offering support, communication, and recruiting.

More details about crisis communication principles and practices, including crafting messages, can be found [here](#).