



CHARACTER AT CAMP GRANT PROGRAM

Implementation Grant Application Packet

Summer 2025

Dear Camp Leader,

Welcome to ACA's Character at Camp Grant Program! Whether you are a seasoned camp leader or new to the field, we are glad you are considering applying for a grant to support character development at camp. This packet includes background information about character and the grant program, details about eligibility and how to apply, and a copy of the Implementation Grant Application.

The purpose of this program is to provide financial support, training, and technical assistance for organizations starting new character development programs, those enhancing or expanding existing programs, and those celebrating character at camp through communications, development, and/or community partnerships. By the end of the Character at Camp initiative, we anticipate camps in the US will represent one of the largest and most potent contexts for character development in the learning and development ecosystem.

Eligible organizations can apply for a Planning Grant, an Implementation Grant, or a Network Planning Grant. To help you decide which is right for your organization, here is a quick overview of each grant pathway:

Pathway	Planning Grant	Implementation Grant	Network Grant
Who Should Apply?	Organizations that need a year of planning, training, and capacity building before they can develop and implement a full character proposal	Organizations that have a specific character proposal in mind and sufficient capacity to successfully implement that proposal starting in 2026	Organizations that serve as the coordinating entity for 6+ camps that are eager to plan and implement a character proposal with their on-site program teams
Duration	One year	Two or three years	One year for planning (if applicable); three years for implementation
Funding Amount	Up to \$50,000	Up to \$300,000	Up to \$375,000 total (\$75,000 for planning grants; \$300,000 for implementation grants)

The information that follows outlines the **Implementation Grant** application process. You can find the packets specific to the Planning Grant program and the Network Grant program on the [Character Grant Program](#) web page. After determining your camp's **eligibility** to apply for a Character at Camp grant, you should carefully consider which grant pathway is the best fit and apply for that grant. You'll find additional details on each grant pathway as well as resources — such as recordings of informational webinars, FAQs, grant program timeline, and access info for office hours with ACA's grantee success team — on the [Character Grant Program](#) web page.

On behalf of ACA's Character at Camp Grant Team, thank you for the work you do to support character development among the campers and staff you serve. Whether you apply for and receive a grant or expand your understanding of Character at Camp through ACA's [Character Academy](#), we are glad you are joining us in this work. Only together can we reach our ambitious goal of elevating camp as an expansive and effective context for character development.

In the spirit of camp,

Laurie Pearson, PhD

Senior Director, Innovation and Learning
American Camp Association

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Who Is Eligible to Apply for a Character at Camp Grant

Eligible applicants include nonprofit organizations that are physically located in the United States and are exempt from tax under Internal Revenue Code (Code) section 501(c)(3) or are a government/municipal organization. Organizations that are exempt from tax under Code section 501(c)(3) must also be public charities under Code section 509(a)(1) (which incorporates Code sections 170(b)(1)(A)(i)-(vi)), 509(a)(2), or (509)(a)(3) Type I or Type II). Tax-exempt religious organizations (e.g., churches and church-related entities) are eligible to apply so long as they are Code section 501(c)(3) public charities.

Additionally, applicants must represent an organization that currently offers day and/or overnight camp programming, which means that each of the following criteria must apply:

- The organization delivers camp programs and/or provides camp facilities/services for other camp programs consistent with [ACA's mission and values](#). Organizations operating at multiple sites and organizations offering camp programming on rented or leased sites are eligible to apply.
- The organization is currently offering programs and/or services that serve campers for at least one full session of three or more consecutive days during summer and/or non-summer months. Camps are welcome to apply for funds to start new programs if they serve campers according to these criteria in some other capacity. Camps offering sessions in a format other than three or more consecutive days are welcome to apply if you can justify in your application why it makes sense for your population for the camp session to be shorter and that you can still accomplish your proposed outcomes in that time.
- The organization is based in the US, and the camp programs for which the applicant is applying are primarily run in the US.
- The camp program(s) for which the applicant is applying for a grant has a primary audience of campers five years and older. *Applicants proposing projects that focus on adult participants must demonstrate the developmental focus (e.g., character programming for adult participants with special needs, or character programming for families attending a family camp) of the adult-serving program.*

Implementation Grant Program Overview

The Character at Camp Implementation Grant Program is designed for organizations with experience implementing new programs or projects and/or experience requesting and receiving grant funding to support a new program or project. Experience implementing character development programs or projects specifically is not required. For implementation grants, it is crucial that you understand your organization's needs related to character development and have the capacity to apply for and, if awarded, successfully implement the program or project you propose. Organizations that are not sure they have the required level of experience described above should consider applying for a planning grant.

Implementation grants can be used to start, improve, expand, or celebrate character-focused programs or projects. These programs or projects can include, among many other possibilities: character-focused curricula, programming, or activities; staff recruitment and training to support character programs; evaluation efforts to understand and

improve character programs; initiatives to build camp culture; and marketing and communication strategies related to the benefits of character programs.

Below are three examples of the many potential character-focused programs or projects:

- **Staff Training to Build Camp Culture:** A mid-sized overnight camp proposes a staff training focused on embedding character values into every aspect of camp life — from cabin routines to conflict resolution. The grant would support training design, hiring a trainer to facilitate sessions during staff training, and follow-up coaching throughout the summer.
- **Character Curriculum and Evaluation:** A day camp working primarily with youth from underserved communities plans to pilot a weekly character-building curriculum (e.g., empathy, grit, leadership) and evaluate its impact through camper self-reflections and parent surveys. Findings will guide future programming and be shared with their broader community network.
- **Marketing to Showcase Character Impact:** A regional camp network of four camps wants to develop a communications campaign to highlight how their programs foster long-term character growth. They'll use video storytelling, alumni testimonials, and social media to raise awareness and build buy-in from families and donors.

Implementation grants will be funded up to a total amount of \$300,000 for two- and three-year projects, based on considerations outlined in the budget guidance chart on page 8. (Applicants are welcome to request funding beyond their recommended range but are encouraged to contact the Character Grant Team before doing so to discuss their plan.) To apply for an implementation grant, a representative of the organization will complete the application, which includes a description of the proposed activities and a budget to support those activities. Organizations selected to receive an implementation grant will be invited to join a community of practice composed of other grantee organizations, will work with ACA's Character at Camp grant team throughout the grant period, and will submit annual reports describing what they accomplish each year.

We welcome both individual and joint applications to the Implementation Grant Program.

Individual applications are for programs and projects that will be implemented by and for a single organization. Single organizations can propose programs and projects to be implemented across multiple sites — this would be considered an individual application if there is a single coordinating entity, and the small number of sites (less than six) operate more or less the same within this organization.

Joint applications are for programs and projects that will be implemented by fewer than six organizations that will receive one grant award to implement programs and projects across each of the organizations. In this case, the organizations are either distinct and functionally independent from each other or are sites that operate more or less independently or with different programmatic foci from one another. One organization would submit the application and serve as the primary point of contact. Applicants submitting a joint application will be asked to identify the additional organizations in the application and to reflect budgetary allocations to these organizations.

You should apply for a Character at Camp Implementation Grant if:

- ☐ You are a single organization or part of a small group of organizations (less than six) working on a joint program or project.
- ☐ You have a clear idea of how your organization(s) would address a need related to character development.
- ☐ Your organization has experience writing grant proposals and/or receiving grants.
- ☐ Your organization has experience successfully implementing new programs or projects to address a specific need related to camper and/or staff development.
- ☐ Your organization has sufficient capacity, both in terms of number of people and expertise, to apply for this grant *and* implement the program or project you propose, if awarded.
- ☐ Your organization can commit to the **Implementation Grant expectations**.

If your organization does not meet one or more of the criteria above, you should consider applying for a **Character at Camp Planning Grant**. Those representing a network organization that includes six or more camps should apply for a **Character at Camp Network Planning Grant**.

Funding is limited, and this is a competitive grant program; not all applicants will receive awards.

See below for additional guidance on how to decide which type of Character at Camp Grant to apply for:

What grant should we apply for?



“We're a camp ready to invest in character work, but we don't have the capacity or experience to implement something new. We will benefit from a year of planning, training, and internal capacity building so that **we can propose and implement a program next year.**”



Apply for the
**PLANNING
GRANT**

“We're a camp that successfully implements new programs, we're excited about investing in our character work, we have a specific proposal in mind. **With a little support we'd have the capacity to implement that character program now.**”



Apply for the
**IMPLEMENTATION
GRANT**

“We're the coordinating entity for a **network of 6+ camps.** We are excited to plan, build capacity, and work with our on-site program team, and to connect with other networks doing similar work. If we get a Network Planning Grant, we intend to apply for a full Network Implementation Grant the following year.”



Apply for the
**NETWORK
PLANNING
GRANT**

Background

The American Camp Association (ACA) represents a community of camp professionals who share in the mission to create quality camp experiences that build a world of belonging and growth. Our work includes a national accreditation program, in-person and virtual opportunities for professional development and connectedness, research, and support for local, state, and federal advocacy — all fueled by a vast community of volunteers, thought leaders, affiliate partners, and collaborators. The [Character at Camp Grant Program](#) is part of a six-year initiative funded by Lilly Endowment, Inc. that is designed to increase and expand character development programs at camps in the US.

For over a century, day and overnight camps in the US have fostered character among young people through a diverse array of programs, facilities, and camper populations. While each camp is unique, most share common features such as an immersive setting, supportive relationships with peers and adults, opportunities for fun and challenging activities, and support for reflection and personal growth. ACA's [National Camp Impact Study](#) demonstrated that, together, these features promote campers' growth in ways that last over time and transfer to other settings, such as school and early work experiences. What's more, findings from ACA's recently released [Economic Impact Study](#) suggest the size of the camp industry — which exceeds 20,000 day and overnight camps — is more expansive than previously thought.

We also know that young people today are experiencing loneliness, isolation, and divisiveness within their schools and communities, which is why opportunities for young people to contribute to and thrive within these places are more important than ever before. Fostering character development in young people is increasingly important, and camps in the US are well positioned to do this. **Thus, the Character at Camp Grant Program provides grant support for starting, improving, expanding, and celebrating character development initiatives at camp.**

What Is Character?

Character itself can be defined in different ways, but one commonly used definition in the field of youth development is best stated by [Character Lab](#): “The intentions and actions that benefit both the individual and others.” With this example of a broad definition of character in mind, we encourage organizations interested in applying to the grant program to think about the specific character strengths they are focused on, such as strengths of heart (e.g., empathy, kindness), strengths of mind (e.g., curiosity, creativity), and strengths of will (e.g., grit, self-control), and to submit proposals that focus on one or more specific strengths. While applicants will not be prioritized based on the character strengths they choose to focus on, we see a particular need for opportunities for young people to practice and cultivate honesty and integrity and thus encourage camps to consider if/how their camp might be positioned to focus in this area.

When considering if your organization should apply and what specific initiative you should request funding for from the Character at Camp Grant Program, we encourage teams to ensure they understand how character is defined and developed in youth development contexts like camp. To learn more about character development, we encourage applicants to check out any of the following widely used character resources:

- The [Jubilee Center for Character and Virtues](#) is a leading research center focused on character, virtues, and values in the interest of human flourishing. They've created [frameworks](#) for character education that can be used by all educators, and they produce influential [research](#) that shapes how institutions think about character development.

- [Character.org](#) is an organization comprised of educators, researchers, and business and civic leaders who advocate for character. Their [11 Principles Framework](#) is a guide to cultivating character in your organization. They [support educators](#) of all kinds to help them develop comprehensive character initiatives.
- [Character Lab](#) connected researchers with educators to create greater knowledge about the conditions that lead to social, emotional, academic, and physical well-being for young people throughout the country. Their [playbooks](#) are research-based guides to cultivating character, including recommended curricula, videos, and books. Their [tips](#) give actionable advice that all educators can use to enhance their work. While Character Lab has concluded their research, their existing resources continue to be available through their website.
- The [VIA Institute on Character](#) has developed the groundbreaking [Character Strengths Survey](#), a scientifically validated assessment designed specifically to measure the 24 core character strengths in individuals. Nearly 35 million surveys have been taken around the world, and VIA supports the advancement of character science through research, personalized reports, books, and more.

Applying for an Implementation Grant

The Character at Camp Grant Program supports a wide variety of programs or projects related to character development at camp, ranging from programs or projects that focus specifically on campers to those that focus on staff or other operational functions that support character development. Applicants will be asked to select a primary category and a detailed focus within that primary category (programs or projects can include activities from multiple categories). Programs or projects can fall in one or more of the following categories:

1. **Starting a new program or project related to character development.**

Examples include:

- Adopting evidence-based character programming
- Testing a new character-focused staff recruitment/training strategy
- Developing a plan to evaluate an existing character-focused program or integrating character development into a new program area, such as a counselor-in-training program
- Increasing staff capacity to implement new character-focused programming through hiring additional staff and/or professional development.

2. **Enhancing/improving your organization's character-focused program(s)/strategies.**

Examples include:

- Reshaping character programming to be more culturally responsive
- Strengthening character-related staff recruitment/training practices
- Evaluating campers' character-related outcomes
- Implementing a continuous quality-improvement initiative to improve your organization's character development programming
- Increasing staff capacity to sustain enhanced character-focused programming through hiring additional staff and/or providing more professional development.

3. **Expanding your organization’s character-focused program(s)/strategies.**

Examples include:

- Building partnerships with schools or community organizations to reach new audiences
- Mitigating enrollment fees to increase access to character-focused programs
- Increasing capacity within an existing program to serve more youth
- Implementing a character-focused program/strategy known to be effective in one camp to additional camps and/or program areas.

4. **Celebrating your organization’s character work.**

Examples include:

- Implementing a communication strategy to better engage families in supporting character development at home
- Increasing staff fundraising skills and capacity to secure external funding to support character-focused program(s)
- Developing communication tools/strategies to demonstrate campers’ character-related outcomes to new audiences.

Organizations are welcome to apply for implementation grants to support two- or three-year programs or projects with a primary focus in one of the above categories.

Applicants can request any amount of implementation grant funds up to \$300,000; however, reviewers will be looking for alignment among several factors: the funds requested, the need related to character development, and the potential for impact (the number of youth served and/or impact among a specific population, such as youth with chronic illnesses/disabilities or youth from low-resourced communities). When preparing your application, please refer to the following guidance:

Implementation Grant Timeline and Budget Guidance	
\$50,000 to \$100,000	<i>Two-year programs or projects, single organization/site programs or projects, and/or organizations with budgets of \$0 to \$750,000 per year and/or <500 campers served (day camps) / <1,200 campers served (overnight camps)</i>
\$100,001 to \$200,000	<i>Two- or three-year programs or projects, single organization/site programs or projects or joint programs or projects, and/or organizations with budgets of \$750,000 to \$3M per year and/or 500–750 campers served (day camps) / 1,200 to 1,500 campers served (overnight camps)</i>
\$200,001 to \$300,000	<i>Three-year programs or projects; single, joint, and/or partnerships programs or projects; and/or organizations with budgets of >\$3M per year and/or >750 campers served (day camps) / >1,500 campers served (overnight camps)</i>

Again, the timeline and funding levels provided in this chart are intended as general guidance, not as prescriptive rules. Proposed funding levels may fall outside of these ranges, as long as they are under the \$300,000 limit. Ultimately, ACA will consider your proposal as you submit it, and ACA will not adjust the amount of your proposed award. If your Character at Camp Implementation Grant proposal is awarded funding, it will be at the funding level in your proposal.

If you have any questions about the timeline or funding level for your grant proposal, please contact ACA's Character at Camp Grant Program team.

Timeline for Implementation Grants

(Note: all dates subject to change)

July 29, 2025	Implementation grant application process opens
October 15, 2025	Implementation grant application process closes
December 2025	Awards announced, grantees notified
January 2026	Start of grant activities, grant funds distribution begins

Implementation Grantee Expectations

You will be asked to identify and designate two members of your organization's leadership/program team to serve as grant leads and to provide their contact information. These individuals should be the people at the organization who are directly responsible for the success of the grant and will be actively involved in the grant implementation. Please read the following grantee expectations as you consider who will serve as your two-member team. If selected to receive a grant, organizations will be expected to:

1. Submit an annual report via our online grant platform, starting with initial paperwork in December 2025 and then once per year of the grantee's project timeframe.
2. Use grant dollars according to the approved budget and proactively report any unanticipated changes to the budget and spending timeline.
3. Maintain a camp membership to ACA (membership funding can be included in the proposed budget if the organization is not already a member).
4. Participate in a learning community of organization leaders approximately 6 times each year during the grantee's project timeframe. Each virtual gathering will include training and peer-to-peer support for grant implementation.
5. Attend optional (but encouraged) in-person meetups at ACA regional and national events (travel funding can be included in the proposed budget).
6. Implement required evaluation activities, including efforts to assess character-related outcomes among campers, staff, and/or other participant groups, and assessments of the grantee learning and engagement in the Character at Camp Grant Program. Grantees will receive training and technical assistance to support these activities as a part of their participation in the peer learning community.

Volunteers are eligible to serve as a project lead if they can meet the above requirements. Additionally, if organizational leadership is not represented on the project team, we will ask for a clear statement of support and approval for the application from camp leadership staff.

Please note: We recognize that staff and staff capacity can change frequently and sometimes unexpectedly. If selected to receive a grant, grantees are encouraged to communicate these challenges as they arise to determine alternatives to the requirements outlined above.

In addition, we recognize that many camps are led primarily or entirely by volunteers. In this case, at least one of the two individuals assigned to this project should be the camp director/executive director, the chair of the board of directors, or whomever in the organization is accountable for financial management and accounting.

Implementation Grant Application Instructions

This application is designed to be completed by members of your organization's leadership and/or program team. We recommend that you bring together a team to work through the self-assessment portion of the application and to identify the character work your organization may want to undertake. While multiple team-member participation is not a requirement, the self-assessment will benefit from multiple perspectives.

We suggest you prepare your answers in a separate document before completing the application in our online grant software, [GLM by Foundant](#), as technology always has its surprises. However, the online grant software saves your responses as you go through each section. You can collaborate on a single application with others on your team; find more about that [here](#).

You will need the following documents to complete the application:

- IRS determination letter and eligibility criteria form
If your organization does not have an IRS determination letter (some governmental/municipal organizations and church organizations may not be required to obtain an IRS determination letter), you may still be eligible for this grant. Additional information may need to be gathered in a way that is appropriate for your organization.
- Your organization's most recent board-approved financial statement, which would include major income and expense lines, assets, and overall profit and loss.
- Your organization's most recently filed IRS Form 990
If your organization does not file a 990, you may still be eligible for this grant. Additional information may need to be gathered in a way that is appropriate for your organization.
- Board roster
- Organizational chart

If you do not have an organizational chart, please use [Creately](#), Google Slides, or Microsoft PowerPoint to create one.

IMPLEMENTATION GRANT APPLICATION

Camp Information

1. **What is the name of the organization submitting this application? If the camp name is different than the organization name, please enter that below.**

Organization name:

Camp name:

Organization website:

Affiliation, if applicable (e.g., Girl Scouts of the USA, Salvation Army, Camp Fire, SeriousFun Children's Network, YMCA, faith-based organization, college or university):

If your organization is part of a larger network organization, ACA encourages you to communicate and coordinate with that larger network team before submitting your grant application.

If the camp name is different than the organization name, please enter that as well. Otherwise, type your organization name again. Please enter only the camp(s) for which you intend to use these funds, especially if your organization operates more than one camp at different locations or with different names.

2. **Does the organization submitting this application have current status as a tax-exempt organization under Code section 501(c)(3) or government/municipal or religious entity?**

Yes

No

If yes, please upload documentation verifying your organization's nonprofit or government/municipal entity status here: [Upload]

3. **What is the organization's primary mailing address?**

Street address:

City:

State:

Zip code:

4. **Is the camp location the same as the address listed above?**

Yes

No

5. **What is the camp location (if different from the organization mailing address)?**

Street address:

City:

State:

Zip code:

6. **What is the organization's mission? Please provide your organization's mission in the space below.**

[Text entry]

Grant Team

While the successful implementation of any proposed grant activities relies on many hands to get the work done, leadership is critical to the program's or project's success. Your grant application will be evaluated based on your demonstrated ability to successfully complete, oversee, and manage the grant award. The following section requests background information on the two grant lead staff most responsible for carrying out the program or project as well as the key personnel required to implement the proposed activities.

We will ask you to confirm the two grant lead positions who will be most responsible for carrying out the grant activities, as well as what support other personnel will provide.

7. Who is the first grant lead at the organization who will oversee the grant award and programs or projects described in this application?

- First name:
- Last name:
- Email:
- Phone:

8. What best describes this person's employment at the organization?

- Full-time year-round
- Part-time year-round
- Full-time seasonal
- Part-time seasonal
- Volunteer
- Other, please describe:

9. What is this person's role/title at the organization?

[Text Entry]

10. Who is the second grant lead at the organization who will oversee the grant award and programs or projects described in this application?

- First name:
- Last name:
- Email:
- Phone:

11. What best describes this person's employment at the organization?

- Full-time year-round
- Part-time year-round
- Full-time seasonal
- Part-time seasonal
- Volunteer
- Other, please describe:

12. What is this person's role/title at the organization?

[Text Entry]

- 13. Please describe the background of the two grant leads listed in this proposal, with an emphasis on how they are qualified to oversee the grant award and carry out the program or project work.**

Applications should provide information demonstrating the ability to successfully complete, oversee, and manage the award, including their organizational experience and capacity related to performing the proposed grant program or project or similar activities (e.g., experience in managing projects and activities like those in the application).

[Text Entry – 3000 characters]

- 14. Please describe the additional resources — including staff capacity, capabilities, expertise, and skills — that will support the management and implementation of the grant activities during the two- or three-year award period. Describe how many other people will support the two grant leads to ensure the completion of the work, and describe what those roles will look like. Please include the approximate percentage of each person’s time that they plan to spend on this program or project.**

[Text Entry – 3000 characters]

- 15. What is the name and contact information for the organization’s leadership (CEO, executive director, etc.)?**

First name:

Last name:

Email:

Phone:

Job title:

- 16. Is the organization leader identified above aware and fully supportive of this grant application?**

[check box]

Application Type

We welcome both individual and joint applications to the Implementation Grant Program. **Individual applications** are for projects to be implemented by and for a single organization. Single organizations can propose programs or projects to be implemented across multiple sites — this would be considered an individual application if there is a single coordinating entity, and the small number of sites (less than six) operate more or less the same within this organization.

Joint applications are for programs or projects to be implemented by fewer than six organizations that will receive one grant award to implement programs or projects across each of the organizations. In this case, the entities are either distinct or functionally independent from each other or are sites that operate more or less independently or with different programmatic foci from one another. One organization would submit the application and serve as the primary point of contact. Applicants submitting a joint application will be asked to identify the additional organizations in the application and to reflect budgetary allocations to these organizations.

17. What type of application will you be submitting?

Individual Application

Joint Application

If you selected Individual Application, please skip to the next section.

If you selected Joint Application, please complete the rest of this section, and then answer all questions in subsequent sections with the collection or cohort of organizations that are a part of the joint application in mind.

18. What are the individual organizations that will be a part of your joint application? Please provide the name of each organization, a brief description of each organization, and the name and job title of each point of contact.

You may include up to four additional organizations beyond the primary organization.

[Text Entry]

19. What defines this collection of organizations? Why does this collection of organizations make sense for this joint application?

[Text Entry – 3000 characters]

20. What connections and conversations related to this joint grant application have already happened with these individual organizations? Please briefly describe the collaborative process that has led to this joint application.

[Text entry – 3000 characters]

21. Please upload letters of commitment from each of the organizations listed in your joint application. Please merge the letters into one document and upload as a single PDF file.

[Upload]

Character at Camp

When defining character, the Character at Camp Initiative draws upon well-established resources, including Character Lab. While there are many definitions of character, [Character Lab](#) defines it as “Intentions and actions that benefit other people as well as ourselves” and defines character strengths as strengths of heart, mind, and will.

For the following question, you should identify (up to) three character strengths that your organization will prioritize to cultivate through the character-focused programs and projects that this grant will support. The options we provide do not constitute an exhaustive list of all possible character strengths. Please feel free to write in an additional character strength under “Other” if necessary.

Your organization likely has more than three character strengths that you seek to cultivate in your participants, but within the context of this grant proposal, your organization should select the three character strengths on which you will focus. You will refer back to these three character strengths throughout the rest of the grant application.

22. What are (up to) three character strengths that your organization aims to support in your grant funded character-focused programs and projects?

- Kindness
- Respect
- Confidence
- Teamwork
- Appreciation of diversity
- Leadership
- Compassion
- Curiosity
- Creativity
- Integrity
- Honesty
- Perseverance
- Gratitude
- Autonomy
- Critical thinking
- Self-control
- Volunteering
- Motivation
- Humility
- Judgment
- Spirituality
- Responsibility
- Resilience
- Independence
- Community-mindedness
- Other [Text entry]

23. Why did you select these character strengths? Please describe, in your own words, the rationale behind identifying these character strengths as those that your organization focuses on over all others.

[Text Entry – 3000 characters]

Character at Camp Self-Assessment

The purpose of this self-assessment is to help your team understand where and how support for character development can be found at your organization. The purpose is also to help your team identify organizational needs, or areas for growth, as you seek to grow and improve that character development work. As a self-assessment, there are no right or wrong answers; instead, we are interested in how you link the results of the assessment to your potential character-focused project ideas.

The grant program is open to organizations at all stages in this work, thus a higher score on the self-assessment does not mean your organization is more suitable for funding.

The self-assessment has seven sections: prioritization, programming, training, staff support, evaluation, communication, and community engagement.

Please use the following scale to complete the self-assessment, taking care to choose the number that best reflects your organization right now. Where possible, respond using the 0 to 4 scale. If you feel a simple “yes” or “no” is the best response, use “4” for “yes” and “0” for “no.”

0 — No, or Not Yet Started: Our organization has not considered this, or we do not have enough information to respond.

1 — Ready to Start / Developing: Our organization has identified this as something we want to do, but we have not yet done it.

2 — Launched: Our organization has just recently launched this, but it is too early to know if we are doing this effectively.

3 — Implementing: Our organization has been doing this work with some evidence of success, but some challenges remain.

4 — Yes, or Leading / Continuously Improving: Our organization is achieving its desired outcomes in this area and is continually adapting as needed.

In completing this self-assessment, please focus on the character strengths you identified in your earlier response.

- 24.** These statements are about **prioritization**. They ask you to consider how deeply character building is embedded in your organization’s core outcomes and how it influences leadership priorities and planning.

Prioritization	0	1	2	3	4
The three character strengths we will primarily focus on are explicitly named in our organization’s mission, vision, or values.					
Organization leadership has defined outcomes for character-based programming.					
We prioritize character-based outcomes when making decisions.					

- 25.** These statements are about **programming** — i.e., your organization’s point-of-service activities and programs. They ask you to reflect on the extent to which programs are designed to build character and whether character development outcomes drive adjustments in programming.

Programming	0	1	2	3	4
We have one or more key programs that are intentionally designed to develop the three character strengths chosen in the previous section.					
We integrate character development to promote the three character strengths chosen in the previous section across multiple programs.					
To achieve desired character development outcomes, we change programming as needed.					

- 26.** These statements are about **training** for camper-facing staff such as counselors, counselors-in-training, and activity leaders. They ask you to reflect on the extent to which training explicitly addresses character development and equips staff with the knowledge and skills they need to support character development.

Training	0	1	2	3	4
Key components of our staff training are intentionally focused on the three character strengths chosen in the previous section.					
Frontline staff understand their role in promoting the three character strengths chosen in the previous section.					
Our organization has dedicated resources for training frontline staff to support character development.					

- 27.** These statements are about **staff capacity** for character development work. They ask you to consider the level of support that exists for staff to engage in character development work.

Staff Capacity	0	1	2	3	4
“Champions” exist who strongly support character development work. These champions could be camp staff members, parents, volunteers, board members, or involved community members.					
Staff time is intentionally dedicated to supporting character development work.					
In general, we dedicate resources to support character development.					

- 28.** These statements are about **evaluation**. They ask you to reflect on the extent to which your organization has specific processes in place to measure progress toward character development outcomes (e.g., surveys, staff observational measures, parent interviews, focus groups, etc.).

Evaluation	0	1	2	3	4
We assess our organization’s progress toward character development outcomes.					
We measure camper outcomes related to the three character strengths chosen in the previous section.					

- 29.** These statements are about **community engagement**. They ask you to assess the extent to which your organization involves its broader community (campers, families, and partners) in shaping and supporting character development efforts.

Community Engagement	0	1	2	3	4
Campers have opportunities to provide input about our organization's character development work.					
The families of participants have opportunities to provide input about our organization's character development work.					
We partner with one or more outside organizations to support the design and/or implementation of our character development work.					

- 30.** These statements are about **communication**. They ask you to consider the extent to which your organization shares information about character at camp with invested parties.

Communication	0	1	2	3	4
We communicate with families about the importance of character development at our organization.					
We communicate with campers about the importance of character development at our organization.					
We communicate with staff about the importance of character development at our organization.					
We communicate with funders, donors, and supporters about the importance of character development at our organization.					

Organizational Capacity

This section will help us understand factors that help you to achieve your desired outcomes in the future programs or projects you design. This will include information about your finances and your organizational structure.

- 31. What is your organization's total camp-related operating budget (e.g., the total costs of running your camp program(s) for one year)?**

[Text Entry]

- 32. What are your organization's sources of revenue? Please list key sources of revenue (e.g., camper enrollment income, individual donors, grants) and approximate percent of total revenue from each source. Note: the total should equal 100 percent.**

[Text Entry – 1000 characters]

- 33. Considering the revenue mix you outlined in the previous question, in what area does your camp need the most support? This can include strengthening existing revenue sources and/or identifying additional revenue sources.**

[Text Entry – 1000 characters]

- 34. Please upload your organization's most recent board-approved financial statement.** We ask that this statement includes major income and expense lines, assets, and overall profit and loss.

[Upload]

- 35. Please upload a copy of your organization's board roster.**

[Upload]

- 36. Please upload a copy of your organizational chart.** You can use free templates in Creately, Google Slides, or Microsoft PowerPoint if you do not have an organizational chart.

[Upload]

- 37. What is your organization's approach to professional development for your leadership staff (e.g., nonseasonal staff, such as camp director(s) and program director(s))?**

[Text Entry – 3000 characters]

- 38. If any of the grant leads that you name in this application to oversee your Character at Camp Implementation Grant (if funded) had to leave their role tomorrow, how would your organization manage the grant award and complete the program or project?**

[Text Entry – 3000 characters]

Program/Project Proposal

The program or project proposal asks you to describe the type of character development work your organization hopes to undertake, what major outcomes you hope will result from that work, and what unique features of your organization will enable you to achieve these outcomes. The proposal should include the nature and type of program or project your organization is interested in, a timeframe and budget size, a rationale, and plans for evaluation and sustainability.

We want to see a clearly articulated, actionable program or project that aligns with your character self-assessment, your proposed timeframe, and your proposed budget. In other words, we want to see that you understand your organization's context and the kind of program or project that your organization is well-equipped to undertake.

In this section, you should demonstrate that you can develop a program or project that is clear, actionable, and realistic.

- 39. Based on the character self-assessment you just completed, please describe in your own words two to three of the programs or practices you currently have in place.** If you do not have any current character programs or practices, please enter "no current character programs or practices" in the space below and move to the next question.

[Text Entry - 3000]

- 40. Reflecting on your answers from the character self-assessment, please describe the organizational needs, or areas for growth, that you identified related to character in one to two paragraphs.** This section should include a description of the primary population(s) the proposed program or project intends to reach.

[Text Entry - 3000]

- 41. Please select a primary category for your proposed program or project:**

Starting a new program or project related to character

For example: adopting evidence-based character development programming, developing an evaluation strategy related to character development for an existing program, or integrating character development into training.

Enhancing your organization's character work

For example: building out character-related training or hiring practices, conducting an evaluation on an existing program based on an established evaluation plan, or engaging in continuous program-quality improvement to improve your organization's character development programming.

Expanding your organization's character development work

For example: building partnerships with schools or community organizations to reach new audiences.

Celebrating your organization's character work

For example, developing marketing materials to better communicate about the character work you're already doing.

42. Please describe, in detail, the program or project you would like to undertake if awarded the Character at Camp Implementation Grant. Please include:

A) An **overview** of the programs or projects you are proposing and describe how they will be implemented during the grant timeframe. Include details about **how the proposed activities address your organization's needs** described in questions earlier in this application and how they are aligned with the areas of focus selected in the previous question. (2–3 paragraphs)

B) The **primary outcomes** (no more than three) that you hope to achieve if you are awarded funds. Outcomes can be program- or project-related outcomes (what you hope to accomplish), and they can be camper- or participant-related outcomes (what participants are going to receive or experience). Each outcome should be specific, measurable, achievable (with your proposed timeline), relevant to your areas of focus and selected character-focused strategies, and time-based. (2–3 paragraphs)

***For example:** Develop a Mission Grit® perseverance enhancement program for kids aged 10–15 attending camp, focusing on resilience, goal setting, and overcoming challenges. Track progress through pre- and post-camp surveys and counselor evaluations. Utilize camp counselors trained in resilience-building techniques, and incorporate activities such as obstacle courses, problem-solving tasks, and reflection sessions. Implement the program over the eight-week camp duration, with weekly progress assessments.*

C) A detailed **description of the activities and tasks proposed**, including **how they are designed to achieve each of your desired outcomes**. This narrative work plan should describe how the work will take place. It should clearly justify everything included in the budget and in the timeline, which you will detail in the next section. (2–3 paragraphs)

Overview: [Text Entry – 5000 characters]

Outcomes (no more than three): [Text Entry – 5000 characters]

Detailed description of activities and related tasks: [Text Entry – 5000 characters]

43. Thinking about the program or project you describe above, what are two or three supports currently in place at your organization that would make this project or program successful?

These can include partnerships with outside organizations, a culture of continuous improvement, a strong staff team, access to evidence-based character curricula, etc.

[Text Entry - 1500]

44. What features of the organization, the camp community, and/or collaborative partners make your organization uniquely positioned to carry out these strategies effectively?

For example, describe your organizational experience and capacity related to performing the proposed project(s) or similar activities; describe unique facilities, geography, camp community, staff, and/or community relationships.

[Text Entry - 1500]

- 45. One goal of the Character at Camp Initiative is to increase the accessibility of character-development opportunities for all campers, staff, families, organizations, and communities, including those who are currently underrepresented within the camp industry. If the project you are proposing helps to achieve this goal, please detail how and why you believe it will do so.**

(Please note that answering this question is not required to complete this application or to be considered for a grant. If you do not wish to answer, please skip to item 42.)

[Text Entry – 3000 characters]

Budget and Timeline

As with planning any project, the budget and timeline are where the details of the project come together. Through developing and explaining a budget and timeline, you will examine and justify the details of the project, including what it is and what it will take for you to get it done. We encourage you to plan realistically and take the time necessary to make sure the budget, timeline, project proposal, and personnel sections align.

For ACA's general guidance on determining your budget and timeline, see the "Applying for an Implementation Grant" section in the application packet. To reiterate, ACA will consider your proposal as you submit it, and ACA will not adjust the amount of your proposed award. If your Character at Camp Implementation Grant proposal is awarded funding, it will be at the funding level in your proposal.

- 46. Implementation Grants may be issued for a two- or three-year term. What is your proposed grant duration?**

- a. Two years
- b. Three years

- 47. Please provide a budget that anticipates the full cost of what it will take to carry out your proposed project.**

The ACA will award grants from \$50,000 to \$300,000. Please include all direct expenses necessary for the project: labor hours for staff (including fringe rate and a total of labor costs), materials needed for camp activities related to the program or project (such as signage, advertising expenses, camper transportation, etc.), and outside services (such as marketing or graphic design).

Please also include a budget justification for ALL EXPENSES listed in the budget. In the budget justification, you must provide a brief rationale for why each expense is important for the program or project and how it relates to supporting your character work.

Labor hours can include the time that it takes to attend the 2026 ACA National Conference and participate in communities of practice, as well as the actual amount of time expected to do the project work, which can include staff training time. (Factor in six virtual gatherings per year, and optional, in-person meetups.)

[Text Entry - Input budget details]

[Upload budget justification]

48. Please provide a short description of all major programs or projects to be implemented during the grant period and when they would happen along a two- or three-year timeline.

Please refer to quarters as three-month periods that start from the date of the grant award. For example, if you are awarded the grant on January 1, Q1 refers to January, February, and March; Q2 refers to April, May, and June, etc. You can use [this template](#) or create your own. Please be sure to include all key activities included in your program / project description.

[Upload file]

Evaluation Plan

Your evaluation plan should align with aspects of your logic model. It should ask the questions: Did what we set out to do work? Did we achieve our desired outcomes? How will we know if we achieved our desired outcomes? And if we did not meet them, what can we do better next time?

Some of the questions below ask you to reflect on where your organization is in your evaluation journey (i.e., what kinds of evaluation strategies focused on character development does your camp already have in place and, if none, what work do you intend to do in this area). There are no right or wrong answers to this section! We appreciate candid and thoughtful responses.

All grantees will also be required to participate in an overarching evaluation program led by the ACA.

49. What tools, methods, and/or resources does your organization currently use to evaluate its work?

[Text Entry – 1500 characters]

50. What are the strategies, methods, or tools that you plan to use to evaluate the impact of your character-focused program or project?

[Text Entry – 1500 characters]

For the next two questions, please indicate to what degree you currently engage in the following evaluation strategies:

51. We evaluate our character development work in a way that allows staff from different parts of our organization to share their feedback about how it's going.

- a. We do not currently do this and do NOT intend to start doing this through the grant program.
- b. We do not currently do this but intend to start doing this through the grant program.
- c. We currently do this but intend to deepen this work through the grant program.
- d. We don't know.
- e. Does not apply.

52. We have an evaluation approach that generates useful findings to inform what changes should be made to our character development-focused work each year.

- a. We do not currently do this and do NOT intend to start doing this through the grant program.
- b. We do not currently do this but intend to start doing this through the grant program.
- c. We currently do this but intend to deepen this work through the grant program.
- d. We don't know.
- e. Does not apply.

Sustainability Plans

This section will ask questions related to the sustainability of your organization's program or project. Sustainability has many dimensions. We want to know if your program or project is achievable, the right size and scale for your organization, aligned with preexisting work at your organization, and not too reliant on two grant leads. We are also interested to know how the work will continue after the grant period ends.

53. What aspects of your proposed program or project will be sustained past the grant period (if funded)?

[Text Entry - 1500]

54. How will the elements of your proposed character program or project (e.g., staffing structures and funding) be sustained past the grant period?

[Text Entry - 1500]

Application Review Criteria

In the review process, we will evaluate and make decisions based on the following aspects of each individual application:

- Proposal Design
 - We will be looking for organizations that clearly describe a starting, enhancing, expanding, or celebrating character-focused program or project that is conceptually coherent and aligned with the needs identified in the self-assessment.
- Budget and Timeline Alignment
 - We will be looking for organizations that propose budgets and timelines that are clearly realistic given the stated needs, the proposed concept, and potential for impact.
- Capacity
 - We will be looking for organizations that demonstrate a strong capacity for the proposed work through a robust leadership structure, repeat donors, and board engagement.
- Overall Assessment
 - We will be looking for organizations that submit applications where all aspects are clear, targeted, aspirational, and achievable.