



Prudential Leadership Award for Outstanding Nonprofit Boards  
Application Form

Organizational Information:

Name of Organization: American Camp Association, Inc., [www.ACAcamps.org](http://www.ACAcamps.org), [www.CampParents.org](http://www.CampParents.org)  
Contact Name: Peg L. Smith Role/Title: CEO  
Contact Phone: 800-428-2267 E-Mail: psmith@ACAcamps.org  
Tax-exempt status: 501(c)3 Type of Nonprofit: Educational  
Year Founded: 1910 Annual Budget: \$5.7 million  
Size of Board: 21 Frequency/Duration of Board Meetings: 2 times per year for 2 days, once per year for 1 day, and frequent virtual meetings

**State your organization's Mission:** The Mission of the American Camp Association is enriching the lives of children, youth, and adults through the camp experience.

**Briefly describe how your board has demonstrated that it is "Governing toward the future":**

**Headline 2008: ACA Board of Directors Members Vote Themselves Out of Office!**

In 2007, the national board of the American Camp Association (ACA) was challenged by its own thinking. The board was becoming increasingly aware of its social and moral responsibility to create and lead the camp community toward greater intentionality in terms of the benefits and contributions to the positive growth and development of children and youth delivered by the camp community at-large. The national board understood (through rigorous peer-reviewed research) that camp experiences for all children can help create more positive year-round learning experiences, addressing many of the concerns expressed by those examining education reform in America. At the same time, the national board recognized they were witnessing dramatic changes in the landscape of the world: social, political, economic, demographic, and technological.

As a 501(c)3 national organization with twenty-four local components (called "sections" by ACA) sharing very limited national-local accountability, the ACA national board had tremendous dreams but was confronted by a plethora of harsh realities. ACA, having a complex culture wherein relationships with the local sections were neither a federation nor a franchise, but rather a hybrid of the two, was struggling to embrace a common vision and mission. ACA's ability to mobilize its collective resources and to advance the success as a whole was compromised not by external competition, but by its own internal competition. Because local sections had their own governing boards, the ability to provide relevant services to a broad range of users — including camp professionals, parents, and others interested in the camp experience — was disconnected, and it often suffered. Without unified operational processes and procedures, ACA's collective ability to achieve efficacy and desired outcomes and benefit from a strong brand position was diminished. As such, the national board launched a situational analysis that resulted in four significant pieces: a profile of "[Truths](#)," a [Preferred Future](#), [Pillars of Hope](#), and a [Call to Action](#).

The realities ("Truths") we discovered about ourselves were raw and revealing. Our dreams — the articulated attributes of our [Preferred Future](#) — would never be realized within the framework of the truths discovered. The desire for visibility, viability, and credibility was not going to be attainable by simply "doing the same thing more frequently or louder." It was also understood changes that were just around the edges or simply cosmetic were not going to lead to the desired outcomes. The changes would need to be all-inclusive and expansive. The [Pillars of](#)

[Hope](#) articulated what the camp experience uniquely provided young people — the opportunity to share an intimacy with nature with those who will carry the legacy of our planet, the opportunity for authentic relationships between and among those who share our world, and the opportunity for health and wellness that is imperative for a productive work force. These pillars are all fundamental to positive human development and the success and health of our society. The ACA national board was responsible for a social movement on behalf of children and youth — a call to action.

The first (and most difficult) discovery was yet to be made. It was an answer to a critical question — “Are we, (the ACA board members) the right people to lead such a movement?” The answer was “No.” The national board did not reflect the envisioned future; they didn’t even represent *today’s* demographic, let alone the future’s. As a result, a bold and courageous act was employed — the board voted themselves out of office and developed a plan to redesign the national board over a period of three years.

The comprehensive nature of this initiative resulted in a formal call to action, [ACA’s 2020 Vision](#). The call to action led to the development of a [Strategic Roadmap](#) to serve as the template for change that was used over the ensuing years. The board understood that ACA must undergo a cultural shift if we were to be relevant to the public and societal needs; capacity would require a high level of participation with those ready to engage, contribute, and participate; and a planned transition designed to lead to transformation would need to be entrepreneurial and innovative in order to create a nimble, adaptive environment capable of meeting the demands of constant change.

Today, the ACA national board, which for more than 100 years had been made up of mainly camp professionals, has been significantly diversified. No longer are all of the national board members professionals within the camp community — half of the new board are from the public at large, providing diversity in demographics, geography, expertise, affiliation, skill, competence, and experience. The board’s jobs are directly related to governing and strategic learning. The board sets policy, and the partnership between staff and volunteers working on operational issues is based upon a distributed leadership environment that shares ACA’s vision for the future.

**Describe how this transformation at the board level has impacted your organization’s capacity to fulfill its Mission, including any measurable results:**

#### **Headline 2010: ACA Reorganizes and Emerges as One Association!**

Transformation is a form of evolution and, if it is not to devolve into a revolution, it must become a process of intentionally managing and maximizing all the organic material you possess — which includes understanding the DNA of the broader community in which you live. The board’s diversification removed the insular, nepotistic nature of its work. The strategic alignment around the vision and the purpose of the association liberated our work from what was often viewed as self-serving or myopic — instead, it was outward looking and directly related to our public goodwill. The national board recognized that the organization could no longer survive as a national organization with twenty-four local sections that were only minimally linked together. Mobilization and unification around the mission and vision were facilitated by the retooling and legal unification of the organization as one association with one governing board; strong local volunteer groups focused on operations, and centralized administrative functions facilitated by distributed leadership. Today ACA recognizes the importance of personal responsibility and accountability and the power of collective action. ACA’s capacity and impact has grown exponentially as a result of our governance and operational transformation. A movement with passion and purpose emerged. ACA is now able to use our collective voices and vision to make better tomorrows for others.

To that end, legitimate work was completed around the cause and case statements for the work of ACA and the camp community. ACA’s public cause for the camp community is simple: to get children to camp. Supporting this cause are three primary statements that make a case for camp:

1. *Health and Wellness:* Camp promotes fitness, reduces childhood obesity, and encourages healthy lifestyles.

2. *Environmental Stewardship:* Camp equips young people with the attitudes, knowledge, and skills they need to be stewards of the environment today and green leaders of tomorrow.
3. *Team Building and Leadership:* Camp helps children learn to overcome obstacles and to believe in their own prospects for success.

The national board leadership around this shared framework, in collaboration with staff and volunteers, has created a landscape that has allowed ACA and the camp community to realize not just a “Return on Investment,” but also a second form of ROI: Return on Influence. In the last three years, we have gained momentum, and therefore influence, in all three of our targeted areas of growth.

1. *Professional Development:* Our commitment to providing professional development opportunities for those who serve young people has been significantly expanded by our educational partnerships. Our results have been remarkable in such a short time, resulting in a 76% increase in new educational courses, and a 98% increase in new educational publications.
2. *Memberships and Customers:* Aggressively reaching out to new and diverse markets with our products, services, and memberships has resulted in a gain in related return on investment of 19.5% in new memberships, and 6% in related product sales.
3. *Government Relations and Public Policy:* Our priority to increase the visibility and support for the value of the camp experience, including reaching out to lawmakers and regulators, has resulted in an increase in the number of advocates for the camp experience by more than 200% in just one year.

Perhaps most impactful of all is the fact that all of this engaged, participatory “influence” has resulted in significant growth in our program that raises funds to send children to camp — our [“Send a Child to Camp”](#) initiative has grown by 655%!

Ultimately, these tangible outcomes have been a result of ACA’s organizational unification and a transformed [national board of directors](#) whose members are now bringing us:

1. *New Thinking:* Business acumen related to marketing and technology, including social media.
2. *New Contacts:* Brokering and partnering with others who share the youth development space — schools, community-based organizations, and legislators.
3. *New Resources:* Access to resources and talents allowing us to create new vehicles of influence such as the [“Because of Camp...®”](#) public awareness campaign (which captures celebrities sharing how their participation in camp has impacted their lives.)

**Please highlight some of the specific actions taken by board members — whether individually or as a group — that helped drive this transformation:**

**Headline 2011: We Will Never Be Done as Long as We Want to Be Relevant!**

In the transformation process, it is important to recognize and acknowledge highlights — milestones that signify critical junctures. The ACA national board has documented a chronology of significant events since initiating the transformation process. Illustrated below are a few of our key milestones.

1. The national board voting themselves out of office, resulting in a change in the board by-laws and development process.
2. The national board rescinding a policy manual that was comprised of a 157 “corrective” operational policies and developing a whole new set of policies that focus on governing and express only critical limitations on operations (leaving staff and volunteers to determine “how” to reach goals).
3. The national board voting to legally unify the organization.
4. The emergence of key board members who served as “champions,” providing critical ambassadorship to the local sections and others when emotions and feelings of disruption and discord were high.

5. Critical stakeholders emerging and transforming their “club-like” representative body into a leadership body.
6. Members of the governing boards of the sections stepping forward and leading the way to eliminate their governing boards and thereby initiating new ways of work and interaction with the vision and purpose of the association.

It has been said that culture can eat strategy. Each one of the milestones shared was a critical juncture, and leaders demonstrated courage during those times, which made the difference between success and failure. Courage is a part of the recipe, a three ingredient recipe for change that cannot be missing or substituted. *Courage* combined with *endurance* is imperative because transformation does not happen overnight or as a result of a single “event.” Transformation is a form of evolution. *Succession planning* must be ongoing and continuous if an organization is going to adapt to a strategy of learning and enduring relevancy. This recipe, and the illuminated transformative milestones, is an expression of ACA’s contribution to the development and education of children. Providing children with year-round learning opportunities that complement the work of schools and families is what the camp experience is about. It was relevant in 1910 when the first camp experience was created; it is relevant today; and it will still be relevant in another 100 years.

Finally, many have asked the national board, “When will we be done?” The truth is when you stop evolving, you become extinct — and that is not in the board’s plan for the Preferred Future.

**In addition to the first place award, honorable mention awards will be awarded in three categories. To be eligible for consideration for an honorable mention award, please select the categories of entry that describe your board’s achievement. (Please select all that apply.)**

Structural Innovation: Recognizing a nonprofit board that worked with staff to find opportunities to improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness through alliances, mergers or other structural changes.

Fundraising Innovation: Recognizing a nonprofit board that worked with staff to develop new or improved fundraising strategies and projects to achieve greatly improved results.

Governance Innovation: Recognizing a nonprofit board that moved its governance practices beyond responsible to exemplary.

Please confirm the following:

We conduct an annual audit of our organization’s finances.

We have conducted a formal, written self-assessment of our board in the past two years.

We have a written strategic plan for our organization.

**Please provide contact information for three individuals from outside your organization that can speak to how your organization and Board are “Governing Toward the Future”:**

Name: Richard Smikle, Esq.

Affiliation to your organization: Legal counsel to the Board of Directors

Phone Number: 317-236-2400

E-Mail: Richard.Smikle@IceMiller.com

Name: Julienne Johnson

Affiliation to your organization: Former organizational change consultant to the Board of Directors

Phone Number: 202-265-2278

E-Mail: JulienneJohnson@gmail.com

Name: Homer Faucett, Esq.

Affiliation to your organization: Former intellectual property counsel to the Board of Directors  
Phone Number: 317-638-2922 E-Mail: hwfaucett@maginot.com

Applications for awards must be received by **July 8, 2011**. Electronic submissions are accepted and should be e-mailed to [anna.tegen@boardsource.org](mailto:anna.tegen@boardsource.org). Applications may also be mailed to:

ATTN: Prudential Leadership Award for Outstanding Nonprofit Boards  
BoardSource  
750 9<sup>th</sup> St., NW, Suite 650  
Washington, DC 20001

Organization's Chief Executive: Peg L. Smith

Signature: 

Organization's Board Chair: Art Wannlund

Signature: 

The Prudential Leadership Award for Outstanding Nonprofit Boards is a program of BoardSource, a national organization dedicated to advancing the public good by building exceptional nonprofit boards and inspiring board service. Support for the program is provided by Prudential and the Prudential Foundation.