



2020 – 2024 STRATEGIC PLAN

FIELD GUIDE



Contents

LETTER FROM ACA PRESIDENT/CEO AND CHAIR, ACA BOARD OF DIRECTORS	3
INTRODUCTION	5
MISSION, VISION, VALUES	6
TRANSFORMATION CHART	7
GOAL — LEADING VOICE FOR CAMP IN YOUTH EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT	8–9
GOAL — EXPANDING REACH, RELEVANCE AND EQUITABLE ACCESS	10–11
GOAL — CHAMPIONING QUALITY	12–13
GOAL — ACCELERATING ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY	14–15
CONCLUSION	15

Dear Colleagues,

While summer camp is an institution with roots over 150 years old, today's campers live in a world marked by constant change and uncertainty. Globalization, automation and artificial intelligence have changed the nature of the workplace, and the pace of that change is gaining speed. Pervasive technology and social media have altered youth development, and children are growing up faster than ever before. However, many lack the relationship, problem-solving, and innovation skills they need to thrive in the future.

The critical skills associated with social-emotional learning — self-awareness, self-motivation, empathy, emotional regulation, etc. — can't be mastered through individual study. To stem the tide of depression, anxiety, and lack of connection among youth, these skills must be taught through shared experiences that allow children to practice, take safe risks, and learn from their failures and successes. In other words, kids still need camp.

Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard from 1869–1909, said,

"The organized summer camp is the greatest contribution America has made to education."

Nearly a century later, his words still ring true. For all that time, the American Camp Association has been helping create powerful social-emotional learning opportunities through high-quality camp experiences — shaping resilient and compassionate communicators, problem-solvers and leaders. But today's greater need demands bolder action and clearer focus.

A year ago, the ACA National Board invested in a nine-month strategic-planning process involving hundreds of interviews, many focus groups, surveys and retreats. In late June, the board adopted a 2020–2024 strategic plan that gives substance to our 20/20 vision. It sets a promising five-year agenda for ACA, and for each of us as experiential educators. Much has changed since we first adopted our 20/20 vision, so today we present a case for bold investment in a future where all children, youth and adults have access to high-quality camp programs.

We invite you to learn more about our overarching strategic goals and priorities and the action items within our strategic plan.



Scott Brody
Chair, ACA Board of Directors



Tom Rosenberg
ACA President/CEO

Building the Future Through Better Camp for All



INTRODUCTION

We know, and our research is proving, camp experiences are undeniably valuable when it comes to social-emotional learning in our modern learning landscape. With this knowledge comes great responsibility.

Our responsibility as an organization is to challenge how we've done things in the past and explore the opportunities for growth, change and progress before us.

The journey in front of us will not be easy but is incredibly important to our future as an organization. Our goals for moving the business of camp forward are ambitious. This field guide outlines plans to ensure the unwavering quality of and expanded access to life-changing camp experiences for more children than ever before.

While the weight of what we want for our children could just as easily break our hearts as inspire us to action, as an organization we choose action.

We are advocating for, reaching and empowering children with the social-emotional learning they need to lead in a future that will require innovation and strong interpersonal skills. (CASEL, 2019).

We understand the vital role camp plays in the contemporary learning landscape (Ozier, 2018) and the urgency required to ensure camp experiences increase in value as a powerful and publicly recognized tool in equipping generations of youth to thrive in school, at work, and in our communities. This knowledge compels us to increase the quality of professional development, training, and events and engage more volunteers than ever before.

The 2020–2024 ACA Strategic Plan includes a focus on expanding the reach, relevance and equitable access to camp experiences through increased public awareness of ACA accreditation while championing quality, youth development and growth on the national stage.

Together we will position camp as a vital learning and developmental experience for all youth.

MISSION



Enriching the lives of children, youth and adults through the camp experience

VISION



Enriching lives, changing the world

VALUES



As an organization we value the world, the people who live in it and the contribution each individual can make.

The American Camp Association is setting a new course with our ambitious five-year strategic plan that reflects our mission to improve youth education and development through positive camp experiences. This transformative plan represents an opportunity to build organizational strengths and solidify ACA as a leading collaborator and partner among organizations focused on improving youth outcomes. Adapting to and innovating in today's changing landscape is key to ensuring that ACA continues to enrich the lives of the youth we serve.

Transformation Chart



LEADING VOICE FOR CAMP IN YOUTH EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT



Advocate for children and youth by establishing camp as a vital and enriching developmental and educational experience.



LEADING VOICE FOR CAMP IN YOUTH EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

ACA will be a leading national advocate for the health, safety and well-being of children and youth. ACA will advance camp as an essential educational and developmental environment for children, youth and adults that promotes learning to support academic, career and relationship success as well as civic engagement. ACA will engage in government relations and advocacy work to support and further these outcomes.



Brand Awareness and Education

Advance public understanding of the value of the camp experience, of ACA and of ACA accreditation, ensuring ACA's relevance in a changing society.



Government Relations and Advocacy

Develop sufficient infrastructure and capacity to monitor and proactively affect federal, state and local issues impacting camps, anticipating threats and opportunities to advance ACA's mission.

EXPANDING REACH, RELEVANCE AND EQUITABLE ACCESS



Advance the reach and relevance of camp by expanding equitable access to camp and growing the camp community through diversity and inclusion.



EXPANDING REACH, RELEVANCE AND EQUITABLE ACCESS

ACA will provide resources, tools and practices to expand the camp ecosystem and to provide culturally relevant, inclusive and equitable access for all, as both participants and staff. ACA will work to expand the camp field by partnering with mission-aligned organizations and sharing resources, knowledge, training and best practices around diversity, equity and inclusion. ACA will increase and diversify its market share in the current camp field through growth and outreach, lifting up the value of ACA accreditation and articulating the lasting impact of camp experiences.



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Foster and tangibly support an increase in diversity, equity and inclusion within ACA and across the camp community.



Strategic Partnerships

As a collaborator and convener, foster existing and create new strategic partnerships with shared-purpose organizations and businesses to the camp community and its impact on children, youth and adults.

CHAMPIONING QUALITY



Drive high-quality camp experiences through evidence-informed best practices, industry-leading evaluation tools and exceptional professional development.



CHAMPIONING QUALITY

ACA will continue conducting industry-leading actionable research to support camps in their ongoing work to assure a high level of quality in their programs. ACA will promote a continuous focus on improvement and will develop tools, resources and best practices to advance positive camper and staff outcomes. ACA will provide best-in-class training for camp professionals and seasonal staff to advance this work.



Professional Development

Further advance the talents and opportunities of camp staff by strengthening education, practical advice, and training for professional and seasonal staff, and by providing resources to support college and career readiness for seasonal staff.



Strategic Research Initiatives

Continue applied research that increases the voice, value and visibility of camp experiences for children, youth and adults.



Accreditation

Deploy tools to measure program quality, continue to grow the number of accredited camps and continue to position ACA accreditation as the foundational standard of camp health, safety and risk management.

ACCELERATING ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY



Ensure the ability of ACA to grow and achieve its mission by improving organizational strength, capacity and alignment.



ACCELERATING ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY

ACA will develop best-in-class organizational behaviors to strengthen operational effectiveness and improve business performance. ACA will improve volunteer recruitment, engagement and development. Establishing robust philanthropic and business development programs will increase ACA revenue and diversify its sources of income.



Operational Effectiveness

Ensure that operating structure, capacity, capabilities and resources are aligned to achieve ACA's mission and the specific strategic priorities of the organization.



Financial Strength and Vitality

Increase ACA's financial strength through new revenue from current programs, emerging sources of revenue and developing fundraising programs that will support the organization's structure and priorities.



Volunteer Growth and Engagement

Grow the number, engagement and satisfaction of volunteers across the country.

ACA needs your help to ensure the children,
youth and adults we serve thrive.

VOLUNTEER

ACA volunteers are essential to the future success of the camp community. There are many ways for you to get involved, including attending one of our many events, submitting a proposal to lead an education session, volunteering as a standards visitor, or joining a committee of your ACA Local Council of Leaders. For more information and to volunteer your time and talents, visit ACAamps.org/volunteer.

Join us on our journey to equip generations of
youth for a bright future!



5000 State Road 67 North, Martinsville, IN 46151-7902

800-428-2267 | ACAamps.org/strategic-plan