

American Staff Orientation to Working with International Cultural Exchange Visitors Overview

Last Updated 1/22/12

It is recommended that this orientation be given to your American staff without international cultural exchange visitors present. It parallels some of the recommended orientation for international cultural exchange visitors, so both groups will have some similar discussions. They could actually be done at the same time in different locations although this module is shorter than that for international cultural exchange visitors.

Why International Cultural Exchange Visitors?

1. Why international cultural exchange visitors:
 - a. The J1 visa program is a cultural exchange program of the US Department of State.
 - b. It is part of a federal program to promote better global understanding.
 - c. The program includes time spent at camp and time spent traveling in the US.
2. Benefit to campers and American staff:
 - a. Adds value to the youth development focus of camp as global acceptance, and awareness is part of the pluralism of the camp community.
 - b. Provides an opportunity for camps to create an international community.
 - c. An opportunity to share information about the benefits in your camp.

J1 Visa Requirements

1. What activities would be considered cultural exchange:
 - a. Sharing of culture/learning about each other.
 - b. Spending quality time in activities together.
 - c. Sharing language, customs, traditions, ideas, etc.
 - d. Learning to accept and value each others' similarities and differences.
 - e. Moving beyond the limitations of political climates to people-to-people interaction.
2. Two types of cultural exchange visitors: Camp counselors and support staff visas
 - a. Camp counselor visa
 - i. Allows the visitor to work only in camp.
 - ii. Must work in program/general counselor areas not support areas.
 - iii. Can directly supervise campers 24 hours a day.
 - b. Summer work Travel visa (support staff)
 - i. Visitor can work in non-camp position for another employer after camp obligation is over.
 - ii. Cannot work in program area at camp.
 - iii. Cannot be responsible for camper supervision.
3. Must return to home country at conclusion of program.
 - a. Visa has an ending date.
 - b. Visa cannot be extended.

Language Challenges

1. Role of sarcasm in American culture and how it relates to others (especially European) can be a challenge.
2. Language similarities and difference
 - a. Even English speakers talk a different language – torch, jumper, etc.
 - b. Learning each other’s language – how we learn
 - i. Common terms or phrases
 - ii. Necessary terms
 - iii. Slang
 - c. Common words in one language can be offensive in another
 - d. Slang words should be appropriate around children
3. Support to language learning- offering help

Stereotypes

Be sure to set the stage by encouraging honesty, respect for each other’s opinions and confidentiality in regards to the discussion outside of the room.

1. Map of the world activity – ethnocentrism do exercise or discuss it with them
 - a. Have each person draw a map of the world (provide blank paper)
 - b. Show them a map drawn by a person from another country (or taken from a book). Is it like yours?
 - c. What makes our view different – ethnocentric (from our perspective) views of the world
2. Ethnocentricity issues
 - a. Our experiences, values, beliefs, behaviors are the center of our world
 - b. How does this relate to the way we interpret new things?
 - c. How does this relate to our willingness to accept new cultures?
 - d. How does this relate to our ability to accept differences in people with whom we will work in camp?
3. What is a stereotype?
 - a. A fixed mental picture of a group that is oversimplified and not based on individuality
 - b. Often based on prejudice
 - i. Often critical and judgmental
 - ii. Based on perception, opinions, feelings rather than reality or actual knowledge
4. How do we learn about other countries?
 - a. Books
 - b. Media
 - c. Movies
 - d. TV
 - e. People
5. What do you know about people from other countries? (repeat for each country in camp)
 - a. Have each person share one thing they feel they already know about people from that country
 - b. Discuss those and gently try to influence the stereotypes
 - c. Be prepared to laugh about it
 - d. Show how those thoughts bond the American staff
 - e. Share that people from countries other than the one mentioned may share some of the same thoughts as Americans
6. What do you think people from other countries know about Americans?
 - a. Have each person share one thing they think others may know about Americans
 - b. Discuss these and have them suggest ways they can gently try to influence the stereotypes
 - c. Be prepared to laugh about it
 - d. How does this affect the ability of the staff to work together?
7. UGLY American – fact or myth

- a. What does this mean?
- b. How did this description originate?
- c. What can we do at camp to dispel it?

International Affairs

1. Countries in the news
 - a. Ask staff about news stories they've heard in the past month about another country.
 - b. Share stories/clippings about any countries that will be represented in your camp
 - c. Ask staff to identify stories about America they think might be airing/appearing in news stories in other parts of the world
 - d. How might these stories influence the creation of the camp community?
2. American movies and TV and their influence on learning
 - a. Have staff identify their favorite TV show or movie.
 - b. If this show or movie were the only thing that someone from another country saw about America, what would they think?
 - c. What can the camp staff do to change this perception?
3. CultureGrams
 - a. Give staff access to CultureGrams about the countries represented in your camp.
 - b. Check at <http://onlineedition.culturegrams.com>
 - c. There is a fee and a world edition as well as a kid's version is available.

Questions often asked of Americans

Americans are often asked questions about the following subjects. Have your staff form small groups and talk about what they might want to share with their new international friends. Be sure to remind them of any limitations you might want put on these discussions according to your camp philosophy.

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| 1. Government – politics | 6. Money obsession | 11. Fraternities, sororities |
| 2. Religion | 7. Sports systems | 12. Literature |
| 3. History | 8. Education | 13. Art |
| 4. Discrimination | 9. Media issues | 14. Theater |
| 5. Movie stars | 10. Music | 15. Museum |

Steps to Inclusion

There are very intentional steps that can be taken to create inclusion of any kind.

1. Theory
 - a. Be sure all groups have equal status within the camp. All groups should have a reason and responsibility for being there.
 - b. Provide stereotype-breaking contact that promotes the positive attributes of each person or group
 - c. Be selective in the choice of group/team leaders – choose positive role models who communicate inclusion, respect and acceptance.
 - d. Provide many quality opportunities for the groups to be together in meaningful and positive ways.
 - e. Promote increased self-esteem by respecting and valuing each person's unique contribution.
2. Reality

Identify ways staff can reach out to international visitors and help to create an inclusive community.

 - a. Group living
 - b. Work
 - c. Time off
3. Create an Action Plan