

Requirements and recommendations for in-person, multi-day programs and camps aimed primarily or largely at minors

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Note: Anytime “I” is written in this document, it refers to the author, Chana Messinger, at the Centre for Effective Altruism. She was a high school math teacher for 9 years before moving to the Community Health team at the Centre for Effective Altruism.

Requirements and recommendations are primarily based on experience with programs for participants of around high school age (14-19). Non-required recommendations and additional notes are based on past experience; if you have your own experience with this kind of work, your views might differ.

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Scope

Scope: In-person, multi-day programs and camps primarily or largely for minors

- *In scope examples: 10 day residential camp about effective altruism, 5 day day-program about global priorities*
- *Out of scope examples: One-off discussion groups, weekly one hour meetups*

Legal and safety considerations

Required

- ☐ Have on staff:
 - ☐ A safeguarding lead who takes primary responsibility for participant safety and well-being
 - This person is who by default participants go to if they're uncomfortable with anything
 - This clarifies lines of command for decision making in this area
 - ☐ If in a location without reliable on-demand Uber/Lyft/taxi access, have someone able to drive in emergencies on-site
- ☐ Assess and follow any legal requirements for your jurisdiction
 - ☐ You will need to assess whether your program counts as a "camp" for legal purposes, and follow relevant legal requirements if so, which can include background checks, CPR training, etc.
 - In the UK, it is generally not required to count yourself as a camp regardless of the activities
 - In the US, if the program is outdoorsy, then it likely is considered a camp, and otherwise is likely not legally required to be considered a camp
 - [US Camp regulations by state](#)
 - ☐ If your program is not a "camp", you will need to assess what other legal requirements (e.g. regarding safety) you have
 - ☐ Look into your local legal requirements regarding whether you or your staff are mandatory reporters to child protective services
 - ☐ In some American states, all mandatory reporters must take a mandatory reporter training, which is available online.
 - ☐ If you are not in a jurisdiction that requires mandatory reporter training but your staff are mandatory reporters, the main safeguarding lead must take the training and communicate the mandatory reporting laws to the rest of staff.
 - Even if you and your staff are not mandatory reporters, you may find yourself in a situation where you deem it appropriate to make a report to child protective services; there is information available online for

how and in what circumstances to do so, and what other aspects to consider

- ☐ All staff must take part in a safeguarding training. Many are available online. Some resources follow:

- One to two staff per program (including the safeguarding lead) should take the longer trainings available online for your jurisdiction (e.g. [this one](#) for California, which is also a mandated reporter training)
- For other staff who will have extensive interactions with minors, one option is this [30 minute training](#) (which can be done more quickly)
- For staff who will not have extensive interactions with minors, there is [a shorter option](#).
- Note: Some of these trainings contain recommendations that are stricter than those present here; those are not added requirements (unless legally required), but they demonstrate what safeguarding involves and what situations may come up

- ☐ Insurance

- ☐ Get [liability](#) and abuse cover insurance

- Notes on liability insurance

- While liability insurance is considered a requirement in this document, there is not complete consensus among those I spoke to. One lawyer's opinion was that it was absolutely crucial, whereas a camp organizer said he thinks liability insurance is easy to get and a good idea but "crucial" might be overstating it.
- After finding a broker, it will take a minimum of a week and a half (and likely longer) to get liability insurance.
 - Recommended: budget a month for finding a broker and getting the liability insurance, since you'll likely need to try multiple people. This is because camps for minors are an unpopular situation to insure.

- Notes on abuse cover insurance

- Abuse cover insurance can be quite hard to get in the UK. It tends to be easiest to get from the existing liability insurance provider.
- It can take a month to get (one recommendation was to budget three months)
- You should typically get at least GBP 1M in damages insured. It will probably cost hundreds or (low) thousands of pounds
- Claims by children for abuse/psychological harm can take place years after the event, and damages can be extremely high (in the millions)

- ☐ Assess whether you need any other kind of insurance by getting legal advice or looking at similar programs' practices

- ☐ If your program is not operated by a formal organization, check your personal liability with a lawyer

- ☐ All instructors and staff (and any third parties who will be alone with minors) should be background checked via some official government mechanism for the country(ies) they have spent the most time in over the previous 5-10 years.

- Possible resources

- For the UK: [DBS Check](#)

- For the US: [GoodHire](#), general background check
- Additionally, if any of these instructors or staff come from the effective altruism community, please reach out to the [Community Health and Special Projects Team](#) at the Centre for Effective Altruism, who may be able to give advice
- ☐ Get a liability waiver if in the US ([example waiver](#)), unless a lawyer indicates it's unnecessary. You may want one for other countries as well, but you will need to consult a lawyer.
- ☐ Do risk assessments for the program, ensuring that the rules and planned activities keep risk within tolerable limits
 - A risk assessment must include:
 - A list of planned or potential activities that carry above average risk
 - E.g. Will participants have access to a pool, bikes, skateboards? Will they be able to be unsupervised off-venue?
 - Safety precautions and rules required for those activities
 - Inspection of the venue for hazards
- ☐ Plan emergency procedures for:
 - A missing child
 - An ill or injured child, or one having an allergic reaction
 - Recommended: Consider what medical care you'd ask for if it wasn't an emergency, e.g. is there a doctor or nurse you can call without having to go through triage at an emergency room?
 - Fire or other natural disaster
- ☐ Have easy access to medical supplies and first aid supplies on site
- ☐ If an overnight program, have someone on staff with first aid training who is confident in and willing to administer CPR. If you are outside the US, UK or Continental Europe, look into your legal liability with regard to giving care.
- ☐ If not an overnight program, either have someone on staff with first aid training as above, or be sure to communicate in a health and safety FAQ what you would do if a participant needed medical attention
 - Notes on liability: In my research, I did not find reason to be concerned about liability regarding performing first aid and CPR.
 - Most countries where I expect grantees to do their work (US, UK and Continental Europe) have either Good Samaritan Laws (removing liability from someone who tries to save another person as long as they do not exhibit "gross negligence") or Duty to Rescue laws, in which passersby are required to offer help (specifics vary by country and jurisdiction).
- ☐ Consider under what conditions you will call parents. Some possible triggers:
 - If a participant gets COVID
 - If a participant needs to go to a medical facility. If possible, call before the participant receives treatment.
 - If a participant receives an injury beyond a cut or scratch, or if they have significant changes in their medical state. Examples might include worsening asthma or an odd rash.
 - A participant has been especially unhappy
 - A participant experiences a significant change to their mental state
 - A participant breaks certain rules

- ☐ Provide participants with a list of local emergency service contact numbers (and contacts for the program team) to add to their phones or carry on their person
 - Particularly if participants are attending from overseas, they may not know what to do if they find themselves lost or in difficulty
- ☐ Take attendance at least once a day, and more often during excursions
- ☐ Keep a record of incidents, including accidents, injuries, medical issues, complaints and misconduct. Include description of incident, time, date, people involved and location.
- ☐ Be especially careful with excursions from the main venue
 - Plan carefully
 - Have a good student:staff ratio (10:1 is a good heuristic for minimum ratio)
 - Carry first aid kits where appropriate
 - Take attendance and have a list of participants easily available

Sub-category: Information from and communication with parents

- ☐ Get parental or guardian permission to attend the program for all minors, making sure to convey the likely activities they will participate in
- ☐ Get contact information for all participants and at least one legal guardian for each minor-aged participant
- ☐ Get medical information for all participants including allergies and whether they have permission to take non-prescription medication [note that medical information should be kept need-to-know for staff]
- ☐ Communicate with parents about the plan for health and safety, including plans for medical concerns or emergencies (e.g. whether or not there will be someone first-aid or CPR certified on site or instead participants will be taken to local clinics). This may be most easily done in a Health and Safety FAQ.

Recommended

- ☐ If you do not have experience running a camp or summer school before, contact multiple people who do have experience before deciding whether to run the camp and to discuss your plan.
- ☐ Train enough of your staff in first aid and CPR that there is usually someone on site with that training
- ☐ Have a way of contacting participants during travel and throughout the program
 - Note that international participants may need roaming added to their data plan
 - Some programs use slacks or discords so that everyone can communicate
- ☐ For overnight programs, recommend to international participants to acquire SIM cards or have SIM cards ready so that you can stay in communication with them while they are at the program
- ☐ Have useful non-prescription medications available (note that minors need parental permission to take them) e.g. ibuprofen / paracetamol

To consider

- If your program is not run by a formal entity, it may be worth becoming a legal entity in order to clarify liability
- It may be worth having epi-pens (or other anti-allergy auto-injector) on site where it is legal to do so, and training a large proportion of staff on how to use them
- Consider having international students purchase medical insurance for the country the camp is in (if you decide, you can reimburse them for this)
- If you have never run a camp before, run a pilot program first (one that is smaller and shorter than you plan your end programs to be)
- In some cases, it may be a good idea to have an AED on site and train staff on its use
 - A seasoned camp organizer says: “I feel strongly about this in outdoor or outdoor adjacent environments, but not in a city. If participants and staff are generally under 40, and no swimming is involved, I'm not concerned about an AED.”
- Consider limiting age range, especially anywhere some participants will be over the drinking age and others will be under it.
 - A large age range, at least in one case, caused issues when participants didn't want to follow rules they perceived as set for people younger than them. It also intersected poorly with a legal drinking age in the middle of the age range of the program.
 - Additionally, romantic and sexual situations become dicier with larger age gaps for potential romantic entanglements
 - There may be reasons a larger age range is the right call. In these cases, I especially recommend communicating clearly with all students which rules will apply across the board.
- Consider a webinar or Q&A with parents ahead of the program to address questions or concerns. Presenters should have sufficient knowledge of the program and be comfortable answering live questions well.
 - In one program in 2022, difficult-to-answer questions were raised and it was noted by at least one participant that they weren't fully answered. It may be worth thinking about what questions you're able to answer ahead of time, and which you'll want to follow up with afterwards.

Policies and rules

Example policies and codes of conduct from potentially similar programs:

Note that some were written to be more broadly applicable, others written to be specific to the spirit of the program the individual organizers wanted to cultivate. The intention of including these is to give a general sense of what policies could look like, but specifics may or may not translate or be ideal for a different context. You may want to communicate with and share ideas back and forth with other programs as you craft your own policies.

- [Leaf's safeguarding policy](#)
- [Leaf's harassment policy](#)
- [Code of conduct](#) from Explore Fellowship
- [Code of conduct](#) from Impact Labs
- [Rules and guidelines](#) from Mathcamp

Required

- ☐ For overnight programs, set a curfew (a time by which participants should be “on-site” rather than out and about - this may still mean allowing them to be in various places within the venue depending on what’s appropriate) to limit risk and keep the focus on the program
- ☐ Create a system for check-ins and check-outs when participants are off-venue or outside of designated areas (e.g. a local coffee shop) so that you know where participants are
 - A designated discord / slack channel seems to be easiest, but there are other options
- ☐ Set clear procedures for parents, staff or participants to convey concerns about a staff member, participant, or activity, (e.g. contacting organizer, safeguarding lead or other designated point of contact)
- ☐ A safeguarding policy that applies to all staff
 - Note: This should have basics around appropriate behavior and safety of participants, as well as some description of the desired norms and culture for your particular program
 - The safeguarding policy **must** include:
 - Banning sex and romance between instructors and participants
 - Any rules or plans around physical safety
 - Clarification of what physical interactions between staff and participants are appropriate
 - Staff should not be in private, uninterruptable places alone with a participant.
 - One on one conversations can be had in: rooms with windows, rooms with doors closed but easily interruptable if someone is looking for you and in a place where someone would think to look for you, during walks outside
 - Some rooms that don’t have windows can still be ok if they are commonly used rooms that are part of the “public scene” (so people might frequently come by and knock, there are generally people around, and sound goes to the outside)
 - The more “away from the action” a conversation is, the more important it is that doors are open or otherwise efforts are made to be less enclosed. Avoid intimate settings
 - The safeguarding policy **is recommended** to include:
 - Banning instructors and staff from sex or romance with participants for some period after the program, e.g. two years (or six months for junior counselors close in age to participants)

- This does not replace the need to take into account power dynamics, age gaps, legality and general good judgment
 - Clarification of what is appropriate to discuss with participants, e.g. staff should not talk about their sex lives with students or high school aged junior counselors
 - Clarification of what is appropriate physical interaction between staff in front of participants, e.g. if two staff are in a relationship
 - How to respond if participants become especially attached to instructors (emotionally, romantically or otherwise)
- ☐ Decide on clear rules and potential consequences for the set of most important areas (listed below). Communicate them with guardians and participants in advance.
 - Areas that must be addressed by the rules (though exactly which rules and consequences are set is not set here)
 - Drugs and drinking
 - Note on being careful about unintended consequences: At one high school program, a student drank too much and got alcohol poisoning. In my view, this was the result of a culture of drinking that was not set well from the beginning combined with knowledge that staff would be checking on people and their rooms, causing that participant to drink faster and more than they otherwise would have.
 - One example: Some participants at this program were upset that the staff tightened the rules in response to finding out about drinking, whereas others appreciated it since the drinking culture had been unpleasant for them
 - Unsafe behavior
 - Treatment of others and staff [e.g. concerning violence, kindness, harassment both sexual and otherwise]
 - For overnight programs, check-ins and curfew. For day programs, expectations about arrival and departure.
 - Other areas to consider when writing rules
 - For overnight programs: rules about going into each others' rooms, including rules about splitting rooms by gender
 - Different camps have different policies here
 - In my view, rules about not going into each other's rooms seem like a good idea (limits issues with sex, drugs and drinking) as long as there are other places to have conversations
 - Do you want to create conditions around amnesty so participants can tell you about issues without risking getting in trouble themselves?
 - Multiple approaches are reasonable here. I'd guess that it's best to allow participants to avoid consequences for more minor issues if they're bringing more concerning issues.
 - Approaches to consider:
 - Some programs ask participants and parents to sign rules or codes of conduct in advance to affirm they have read them

- Some programs have separate rules and codes of conduct, where codes of conduct are more barebones and signed ahead of time, and rules go into more depth
- Train staff in the program's policies including safeguarding policies. In this training, include open discussions about the culture and norms you want to set.
 - The goal is for staff to understand the rules they are committed to and those they are committed to enforcing, as well as how to implement them.
 - This is an opportunity to set the culture you want to have and make it more likely for staff to bring up issues during the program and address them well.
 - Discuss physical and emotional safety of the students and what to do if anything seems unsafe or people appear upset or uncomfortable
 - I recommend discussing a variety of tricky situations with all staff ahead of time and eliciting what different people think should be done (recommendations in the "Recommended" section, below). You'll likely get a lot of valuable disagreement, and can have difficult conversations in advance.
- Have all participants convene at the beginning of the program, and use this opportunity to explain all rules to them, what the consequences might be and answer any questions they might have. If some participants couldn't be present (e.g., unexpected delayed arrival), have a separate in-person conversation with them.
 - This is another opportunity to set the culture and signal what you will take seriously when issues are brought to you.
 - Recommendation: I suggest using a tone of clarity and fairness, rather than punishment (good framings for rules tend to orient around keeping the program safe and a good experience for all)

Recommended

- Discuss health and safety somewhere on your public website
 - A spot-check of [four in-person programs](#) demonstrated that all of them discussed health and safety somewhere on their website, whether as a standalone page, policy or in their FAQ
- The staff discussion about safeguarding and rules is strongly recommended to consider the following scenarios
 - Mental health issues that may arise among participants e.g. depression, anxiety
 - For overnight programs, homesickness
 - Bullying
 - Situations under which a participant would be given consequences or asked to leave
 - Romantic and sexual situations among participants
 - E.g. A participant asks out another one, the one being asked out is uncomfortable
 - Drug and alcohol use among participants
 - Note: Drugs and drinking, in addition to the intrinsic concerns, also add complications to any sexual situations
 - A participant stops going to sessions and spends the maximum time off site
 - A participant feels pressured by the program or material

- A participant is rude or mean to a staff member or other participant, or vice versa
- Participants start dating
 - One program's materials suggest the approach: "Approaching the conversation with them openly, something like "hey, I noticed that you've been spending time with PERSON. How has that been going?", and seeing what they are willing to share first is great."
- Difficult conversations
 - People bring up extreme thought experiments, e.g. involving drastic violations of common-sense morality or suicide
 - Especially politically sensitive things come up
 - Figure out what conversations you feel your staff are equipped to have a sensible and reasonable conversation about with young people
 - Come up with interventions that are better than "don't talk about that" and better than "let's definitely have this version of the conversation, now, with whomever is around"
 - Encourage staff to find ways of making conversations better without shutting the conversation down.
 - Note that "weird" topics presented or discussed at the program may make it back to friends, future participants and/or parents, and often in low-fidelity relative to what was originally said
- A participant develops a crush on a staff member
- What happens if participants break serious rules
 - You want to be clear that good judgment and discretion should be used, but it's easier to be fair and consistent if situations have been considered beforehand
 - When alcohol issues came up at one program summer of 2022, advice from several other camps' representatives was to address first time offences (and in some cases even later ones) with conversation and not other consequences.
 - The conversations would be aiming to connect with the participant and with what the camp was trying to accomplish
 - One balance to strike is having rules taken seriously while also creating a relationship to participants that's relatively open and collaborative
- ☐ The staff training is recommended to include:
 - A reminder that young people might admire staff a great deal or emulate their behavior and beliefs, and that staff should be cautious about their influence
 - For overnight programs, emphasize to staff that being away from home, entirely surrounded by new people, combined with lots of new ideas and not much sleep can be very emotionally intense experiences for participants.
 - Participants are likely to have heightened experiences e.g. making friends quickly, feeling extremely enthusiastic about the program, sometimes feeling especially devastated or conflicted about emotional upheavals.
- ☐ Have a clear COVID policy and plan ahead of time what you will do if someone gets COVID

- ☐ Allowance and often (depending on circumstances and safety) encouragement for participants to go off-venue to take walks.
 - It's good for having space to talk and think, and giving them some freedom.
- ☐ Aside from the above walks, I recommend a norm of staff and participants being on venue most of the time relative to e.g. hanging out and doing fun things in the surrounding city - it makes safeguarding easier and also is valuable for creating a more shared culture.

To consider

- Other elements that might be appropriate for your public website
 - Security presence
 - Safety policies
 - COVID policies
 - Safeguarding plan
 - Stating that staff will be background checked
 - The level of experience your staff have in working with young people.
 - Code of conduct (this was present for Hack Club and Recuse but not seen on spot=checked websites of camps for young people)
- Take a lens of “skeptical parent” when you look at your website and communications; even better if you get a parent who’s similar to parents of those in the participant pool to take a look

Emotional Well-being

Recommended

- ☐ Point out any staff who are especially responsible for participant well-being (safeguarding lead, contact person, others) during your opening talk, and indicate how participants can communicate with them.
- ☐ Create a way for participants to anonymously share concerns
 - Note: Participants rarely use these by default, but it's low cost
- ☐ Think carefully about how to present emotionally intense topics like global catastrophic or existential risks.
 - Some people find these very emotionally hard to engage with, especially when they are presented as concrete issues rather than abstract ideas
 - It is important to frame and present these ideas in ways that do not put inappropriate pressure on participants to believe or buy in to them
 - Some people are much better at this than others
 - If you do not have experience communicating these ideas to young people, I recommend talking to others who do. They can give context on ways such communication can go wrong and advice for presenting the ideas well.
- ☐ Have a plan for tracking participant well being (e.g. are participants feeling lonely, sad, socially at ease, uncomfortable with the ideas, feeling pressure to have certain views)

- Many programs in the effective altruist or rationality community track this explicitly in spreadsheets to make sure no participant is falling through the cracks.
 - Another approach is to split participants into small groups with assigned instructors that meet regularly for check-ins.
- ☐ Get anonymous feedback about the program either throughout or at the end, to know how to improve. [Example feedback form](#).

To Consider

- Take more care with programs with a higher level of intensity and more interaction (especially one on one) between adults and minors
- Gender ratio: Try to avoid a more than ~2:1 ratio
 - In practice, the negative effects of an unusually unequal ratio at one program that I was aware of was one participant feeling that the program itself was sexist, rather than feeling directly uncomfortable with the ratio. I wouldn't expect to have heard all the concerns.
 - Depending on the pool that's being drawn from, many of the participants may be used to male dominated spaces
 - If for some reason you expect an extremely unequal ratio, consider reaching out to those of the minority gender in advance to flag it and let them know you're there to support them, or having a conversation about it early in the program. In either case, aim for a casual feel to avoid making the issue larger or creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- It is normal for a small proportion of the participants to take up a majority of staff energy
- It's easy to slip into strong persuasion on issues you see as important, and even accidentally pressure people. It takes care and thought to avoid this dynamic.
 - You know a lot more than young participants on the topics you're presenting, and so it will be easy to seem smart and like you've thought of every possible consideration.
 - Just saying "but feel free to disagree" or similar is not enough. The dynamic will be affected by how you react towards disagreements and how you engage with participants who disagree.
 - Participants may seem immediately very sold on the ideas presented; it's good to encourage them to take time to decide what they think.
- Participants in a wide range of programs, from rationality programs to horse camps, sometimes use the word "culty" to describe them, including during the program.
 - Most instances I heard seemed pretty clearly to be jokes to me, so I would advise against overreacting if this comes up during your program.
 - On the other hand, this can be a way that participants can voice vague discomfort they don't yet feel otherwise ready to bring up, so it can be worth checking in on.
- For relatively intense or ambitious programs (e.g. any that hope to give participants a transformative experience), I think it's useful to tell participants at the end:
 - Not to make any irrevocable decisions post program for a few weeks (this is most relevant the more intense your program is)

- That a “dip” in feeling is normal after an experience like this, the shift from intense all-day experiences to normal life can create a jarring effect. They might find it helpful to be aware of this in advance, and to reach out to people they feel close to if it comes up.
- If a key goal of your camp involves teaching participants about rationality, effective altruism or related ideas, you can contact the [Centre for Effective Altruism's Community Health and Special Projects Team](#) for additional advice as well as context on outcomes from past programs related to these topics

Culture and Engagement with Participants

Recommended

- ☐ Be clear on the website and in staff training what the program's relationship is to funders, and movements or philosophies (e.g. effective altruism, existential risk, AI safety).
 - This ensures both staff and participants are clear on what the program is about
- ☐ Be clear with staff (in hiring and in staff training) what the theory of change of the program is
 - It's easier for staff to know how to orient to participants and the tasks at hand, what kinds of follow up to prepare for, how to present the information, etc. if they know the program's theory of change.
 - For instance: whether the program intends to give participants skills vs. increase their interest in a topic
- ☐ Aim for transparency in the culture and honesty with participants
 - Participants are often curious about e.g. funding sources if the programs are free, what the program's “agenda” is, and so on, and forthrightness is valuable and builds trust with participants.
 - Sometimes there are things you don't want to or are inappropriate to talk about, and it is often good to be forthright about that if they come up
- ☐ Many participants describe one on one conversations with other participants and staff as among the most valuable parts of the program for them (they can ask questions, bring up issues, explore ideas they're having, discuss the ideas from the program in more depth, develop stronger rapport with each other or with staff, etc). I recommend setting up opportunities for these conversations.
 - One approach is to have carved out time where participants are paired with each other or staff; without the formal structure, conversations generally require more encouragement to get started.
 - I recommend at least once, officially pairing each participant with a staff member. Participants differ on whether they like this, but it seems worth it overall.
 - I would also recommend at least once doing official pairings between students, though views on that from participants are even more mixed, so it's a judgement call
 - These conversations can be awkward. Help can come from:
 - Conversation decks available

- Thinking about the questions staff think participants will find valuable or interesting, or that staff hope participants engage with
 - Other aspects of the culture of the program supporting good conversations about the topics of the program
- ☐ Have a plan for follow-up with participants after the program
 - For instance, participants may be interested in suggested resources or further readings
 - If staff have time, they may want to offer meetings or office hours with interested alumni of the programs as appropriate
 - Some programs aim to create a vibrant alumni community, e.g. planning meetups, creating fora for previous participants to connect, etc.
 - If young people are considering moving away from home for reasons related to the program, especially if there is some connection to effective altruism, it's ideal if they can have some kind of support and some context about what tends to go well and poorly in those situations. Some resources are [here](#) and [here](#), though it's likely most helpful for them to be introduced to someone to talk to.

Hiring

Recommended

- Good features of potential hires:
 - Experience working with young people
 - Having and displaying the virtues of the culture you're trying to set
 - E.g. If you're trying to convey virtues like truth-seeking or altruism or ambition, it's good to hire people who exhibit those traits
 - You may want to think about what ideally your program's orientation to participants is (helping them with their goals, teaching them information you think they should know, demonstrating the value of certain ideas) and hiring people who embody that orientation naturally
 - Can be trusted to act appropriately with participants
 - Have good judgment in general
 - Are reasonably socially and emotionally capable [you might want to hire people who have a range of emotional styles]
- ☐ An operations and logistics team, put together early (a sufficient team might consist of just one person). Within that:
 - ☐ Ideally there is at least one person who can be on the lookout for burnout within the operations team and make calls on hiring more if needed.
 - Notes: I have seen two programs think that instructors could do sufficient logistics during the program, but then choose to hire operations staff during the program.
 - It's easy to assume instructors and camp organizers have more spare time during programs than they end up having
 - In one case, there was disagreement about the need to hire another person for this work - this came down to what amount of comfort to

offer to participants. Another approach would have been to offer less in the way of comfort and then not hire an additional person.

- For small programs (10-20 people), it may be that the instructors can do enough logistical work that you don't need a separate team. The more ambitious your program, the more important logistics are.
- ☐ If you have never run a program for people of this age before, hire someone who has experience working with the relevant age group
- ☐ Have at least one person per ~30 students trusted to make hard judgment calls: e.g. on consequences, rules, talking to staff about inappropriate behavior, when to talk to parents, being responsible for talking to parents etc
 - These judgment calls can range a large amount, and it's often surprising and stressful in the moment.
 - As a program organizer, if this person isn't you, be sure you are on the same page about the kind of judgment calls you want to see made.
 - E.g. someone drawing from experience as a teacher may have a different intuition about consequences than someone coming from a camp background.
- ☐ Hire at least one person with experience being responsible for the safety and care of young people, ideally for the country you're in
- ☐ Have at least one person per ~15 people that you trust to have emotionally sensitive conversations with participants and staff
 - Programs that aim to teach certain content that can be emotionally sensitive (e.g. around mental health or ethics) will want to be sure there are people around who can support processing
 - Overnight programs in particular can be emotionally intense for both participants and staff, and they may need support, including if they don't explicitly ask for it
 - It's not uncommon for participants or staff to have emotionally difficult moments or days at these programs, or be unrelatedly going through mental health issues.
 - They should have strong social skills and be able to spot when people feel uncomfortable, and feel willing to take action, and be cool in a crisis
 - They should be able to discuss things like:
 - Something that is making it difficult for a participant to participate
 - A conflict a participant is having with another attendee
 - Talking through an emotional part of the programming
 - Personal, medical, or mental health struggles
 - You want enough people that there's usually someone free if a participant needs to talk to someone
 - I recommend at least one person in this role to be a woman
 - More resources
 - In some contexts, these people are known as "contact people". See this [Resource for contact people](#) and this guide to [Community management for events](#) (written for effective altruist events aimed at adults)

- ☐ I recommend hiring staff with a range of styles - participants will gravitate towards the people they like and feel safe around, and having a diversity of people can give more participants an opportunity to have an adult they feel especially at ease with

To consider

- If you have never run a program like this before, it might be worthwhile to hire someone who has for your first program.
- It can help to hire people with interesting and valuable disagreements to get at better conversations and thinking
- Consider having at least one person explicitly looking out for staff burnout / wellbeing, and potentially even professional development and improvement
- Consider discussing staff well being and how to take time off during the initial staff training
 - For long, intense programs, it's good to have explicit encouragement to take some time off during the program with repeat encouragement recommended throughout camp if you want people to actually do it
 - The more "on all day" counselors are expected to be, how much late night conversational culture you'd like to create, etc, the more important breaks and taking time off is.
 - A norm of less time off is reasonable if obligations are lower / the program is less intense, but people vary in what they need
- For overnight programs, consider having someone designated as the person for participants to wake up at night if they have any problems so that you can lower the chance things get really out of hand
- Note that the more ambitious your framing for your program, the more scrutiny there will be from parents, participants and in general

Preparation

Recommended

- ☐ If staff are writing their own classes, or if there is uncertainty about the schedule, it is extremely helpful to have a few pre-program days for discussing the schedule, making decisions, and preparing classes.
- ☐ Encourage staff to prepare and practice their sessions ahead of time - this is almost always under-done.

Venue and Operations

Recommended

- ☐ Keep most activities and accommodations to one venue, rather than spreading them out across different ones

- This makes it significantly easier to set tone and culture, as well as keep track of what's going on
- ☐ Go to the venue ahead of time to make note of the neighborhood, buildings, and see what rooms are being offered.
- ☐ Venues benefit a great deal from having a clear shared default space. It improves conversation and culture
- ☐ For overnight programs: Venues should ideally have rooms aside from bedrooms where participants can play games, have more private conversations, and so on
- ☐ For overnight programs: Try to avoid your venue being in city centers or close to potential night life to limit concerns of what participants do when off-venue.

To Consider

- Sometimes it is normal for staff to use their own money for camp expenses and be reimbursed later; in such situations, consider that not all staff have the ability to be out hundreds of dollars or more on short notice.
- My personal experience has been poor at many of the Oxford colleges as venues. I find they're quite spread out and have a lack of shared spaces.
 - I would recommend against Lady Margaret Hall (though the relevant program director disagrees), Wadham and Balliol. I do recommend Exeter.
 - A few of these colleges also have a surprising lack of sources of running water
- The more food and snacks are on-hand, the less participants go off-site
- Consider including some familiar cuisine/snacks from international students' home countries if you have an international list of attendees
- Consider the pros and cons of running multiple smaller programs or fewer large ones, if that is a question on the table.
 - Smaller programs can give participants more individual attention and potentially have better instructors (if you can continue to re-invite them from previous programs).
 - Larger programs have lower fixed costs, and excellent instructors may only be available once during a summer or other season of programming.

Related documents

Requirements and recommendations for:

- ☒ Checklist: Programs not aimed at minors but where minors are present
- ☒ Checklist: Remote programs aimed largely at minors