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Benchmarking Strategies Used to Increase Diversity, Equity, Inclusion at Summer Camps

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Introduction

Summer camps in the United States operate in different contexts and formats to attract and serve youth with varying backgrounds. Overall, they currently serve more White, able-bodied, middle- to upper-class youth than youth of color, LGBTQ+ youth, youth with differing physical abilities, and other diverse identities (American Camp Association, 2018; Browne et al., 2019). Like many youth organizations, many camps view this trend as problematic and are addressing it through new and updated diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies and practices (American Camp Association, 2013; Gutiérrez et al., 2017). These include developing inclusive and equitable administrative policies, assessing and evaluating DEI in programs, and increasing access to camp by removing barriers and recruiting underrepresented campers (Browne et al., 2019; Simpkins et al., 2017; Spielvogel et al., 2023). Staffing is another important focal point because employees create organizational culture (Mor Barak et al., 2016). Many camps concentrate on recruiting and hiring employees whose social identities reflect the diversity of the campers they already serve or whom they want to attract (Spielvogel et al., 2023). They also use DEI training to improve their employees' ability to act in ways that promote inclusion (Spielvogel et al., 2023). While some research has documented DEI strategies used at summer camps, no research to date has assessed the prevalence of specific strategies used at camps across the United States. Therefore, this study aims to identify the frequency of specific DEI strategies used by camps, effective approaches to hiring staff from underrepresented backgrounds, and training strategies that support existing staff in incorporating DEI practices into their work. Having this data will enable camps to self-evaluate their own progress. It also establishes a benchmark where future scholarship can begin to determine how to assess and promote more effective DEI practices.

Keywords: marginalized youth; underrepresented youth; staff recruitment; staff training

Literature Review

Summer camp provides an important developmental opportunity for youth where they can learn to work in teams; live with peers; form their identity; and develop skills such as self-confidence, organizational abilities, responsibility, independence, perseverance, and emotional regulation (Bialeschki et al., 2007; Wilson & Sibthorp, 2018). In the United States, the American Camp Association (2018) reports that approximately fourteen million youth attend roughly eleven thousand camps each year, but attendance remains skewed toward white, able-bodied, and middle- to upper-class youth, with only a third of participants coming from diverse backgrounds and another third from lower-income backgrounds. The origins of these attendance patterns can be traced back to historical and systemic factors that excluded youth with certain backgrounds. Summer camps in the early twentieth century were designed to "promote cultural ideals, notably the White, masculine, nationalistic ideals of order, discipline and self-reliance" (Browne et al., 2019, p. 53; Van Slyck, 2006). Although most camps no longer explicitly adhere to these values, these values have shaped past and current camp culture. Summer camp is thus a more normative activity for youth aligned with dominant culture, which may impact participation rates and the quality of the experience among youth with different social identities. Other factors that can impact attendance include affordability, accessibility (e.g., transportation, wheelchair-accessible cabins, gender-specific bathrooms), and the ability of camp to respond to cultural needs (e.g., religious practices) (American Camp Association, 2013; Baker & Hannant-Minchel, 2020; Browne et al., 2019; Gillard et al., 2014).

Given these concerns, summer camps have been making efforts to create a more culturally responsive and inclusive environment for underrepresented youth, so they feel welcomed and interested in attending. While each camp defines "underrepresented youth" differently based on the social identities of its campers and the broader community they serve, we use the term "diversity" in this paper to represent various social identities, including race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical ability, religious identity, and socioeconomic status.[1] An inclusive camp is one where youth with underrepresented and diverse social identities feel a sense of belonging and respect for their unique identity, allowing them to fully participate in the camp experience without having to compromise or conceal aspects of their identity, and where staff adapt programming to be relevant to youth (Brewer, 1991; Mor Barak, 2015; Simpkins et al., 2017).

Achieving DEI goals can be a complex process that starts with the organization's approach to the work, philosophical values, and policies, which are determined by the leadership team (Bond & Haynes, 2014; Cross & Braswell, 2019). One strategy that organizations often take with the hope of accomplishing these goals is to focus on hiring and recruiting diverse employees with the aim of promoting those with underrepresented backgrounds into leadership positions. This way, they can change the organizational culture and enact inclusive and culturally responsive policies (Allison, 1999; Lee et al., 2019). In the context of summer camps, hiring employees from underrepresented backgrounds also serves the purpose of ensuring that campers work with counselors who share their identities and experiences (Richmond et al., 2018). Currently, camp staff are predominantly White and from middle- to upper-class backgrounds (American Camp Association, 2018). By hiring employees from diverse backgrounds as camp counselors, camps hope to create a more positive, culturally relevant experience for today's campers and also to build a pipeline of future diverse camp directors in the long term. While many camps use these strategies, their effectiveness has been largely untested, pointing to a need for additional research.

Study Purpose

Although numerous DEI strategies have been reported at camps in the United States, their prevalence remains largely unknown. This makes it difficult to assess how many camps are engaged in DEI work, how camps are approaching this work, and what tools they need to do this work more effectively. To address this gap, we conducted a benchmarking survey of DEI strategies used by summer camps across the United States, drawing data from a large sample of camps, including those that are and are not accredited by the American Camp Association. In addition,

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1   The terms "underrepresented" and "diverse" are used intentionally throughout the paper to convey distinct meanings. "Underrepresented" is defined contextually, referring to groups of individuals whose presence does not align with rates one would anticipate based on relevant demographic data. Historic and systemic considerations contribute to this result, leading some groups to be underrepresented while others are overrepresented. Although increased representation is one metric to measure the success of DEI efforts, it comes with limitations, particularly when an organization focuses on numerical representation without addressing deeper systemic issues. "Diversity" refers to individuals whose social identities differ from those that are dominant in a given context, encompassing traits such as race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, religious identity, socioeconomic status, and other identities.

given that employees play a significant role in shaping organizational culture, the study sought to explore effective strategies for recruiting and hiring diverse employees, and to identify successful approaches to diversity training for camp staff.

Methods

To investigate which strategies camps currently use to address DEI goals, we distributed a survey at the 2022 ACA National Conference to attendees via session announcements and the mobile conference app. The survey was also distributed through ACA Now email newsletter and through Y-USA's online newsletter. While the aim was to obtain a representative sample, the sampling strategy resulted in a skew toward ACA-affiliated camps, which often are also ACA-accredited. In the survey, participants were asked about twenty-two DEI strategies drawn from prior research on DEI efforts at summer camps (see Spielvogel et al., 2023), which were grouped into five categories. Participants indicated whether and how effectively their camp used the strategy, selecting from four choices: their camp does it well, their camp tries to do it, their camp does not do it, or unknown. If they responded that they did a strategy well, they were asked to report what works well. If they did not use a strategy, participants were asked why they did not use this strategy. To manage survey length, participants were randomly assigned to complete follow-up questions for a maximum of ten strategies (no more than five that they did well and five that they did not do well). The strategies and categories are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Strategies Included in the Benchmarking Survey

Category	DEI Strategy
Governance and Administration	-Comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards -Written policies regarding equitable and inclusive practices at camp -A staff member(s)/person who serves as a resource for campers who request accommodations for disabilities -Written goals or objectives for DEI -A staff member(s)/person who serves as a mental health resource for camp -An official DEI committee or working group for our camp -A staff member(s)/person who serves as a DEI resource for camp
Hiring and Training	-Have formal training for staff on DEI topics -Hire diverse staff who reflect our campers and community -Explicitly screen staff for biases and bigotry
Evaluation	-Collect information from stakeholders on how camp can serve community -Collect data to inform DEI decisions -Conduct (or have conducted) a formal DEI audit to identify potential problem areas for camp
Programming and Climate	-Accommodate diverse food choices -Invite campers and staff to share their pronouns (e.g., he, she, they) -Supplies and materials available to accommodate diverse campers' needs -Eliminated cultural appropriation(s) at our camp -Provide all-gender and nonbinary housing options
Camper Recruitment and Access	-Provide financial assistance for campers who can't afford to attend camp -Have campers attend our camp(s) who reflect our community -Provide busing or subsidized transportation to youth who need it -Outwardly communicate commitment to DEI on website, marketing, and during enrollment

Participants ($n = 19$) who reported that they did well at hiring diverse staff and training staff on DEI strategies were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews to gather more detailed information about how they

approached hiring and training, which was one of the more commonly reported strategies that camps are trying to do but are not yet doing well. Interview questions focused on what camps specifically did regarding hiring and training with the aim of eliciting success stories and challenges. Participants described the strategies they used, how they approach recruiting diverse staff, how they approach staff training, and how these strategies created a more inclusive atmosphere for staff and campers. The interviews were conducted via online video conferencing software, lasted between thirty minutes to an hour, and were transcribed. Two coders reviewed each transcript and used an open and axial coding process to create themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2009). After reading and immersing themselves in the data, the coders met to discuss their codes and collapse them into themes. As the intended focus of the interviews was on hiring and training, most of the interview findings addressed this topic. However, the conversational nature of the semi-structured interviews frequently elicited information related to other strategy categories. Thus, for ease of interpretation, results from the interviews are presented with the DEI strategy categories below.

Results

Camp staff (*N* = 390) from camps across thirty-nine states completed the survey in the spring of 2022. Most camps represented in this survey were overnight (53 percent) and not-for-profit (89 percent). See Table 2 for detailed descriptive statistics for the camps in the sample and Table 3 for demographic data from interviewees. As the focus of the survey was for camp professionals to describe their camp and how their camp approaches DEI, the survey questions asked participants to describe their camp rather than themselves.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Camps in Survey According to Camp Staff (*N* = 390)

Camp Characteristics	N	%
Accredited		
Yes	215	75%
No	71	25%
Population Served		
Primarily youth without marginalized identities	200	70%
Primarily youth with marginalized identities	89	31%
Region		
Western	88	37%
Southern	64	27%
Mid-American	61	25%
Mid-Atlantic	21	9%
New England	7	3%
Camp Type		
Overnight only	109	28%
Primarily overnight	96	25%
Day camp only	34	9%
50/50 day and overnight camp	28	6%
Primarily day camp	18	3%
Funding Model		
Affiliated not-for-profit	124	43%
Independent not-for-profit	115	40%
Independent for-profit	27	9%
Municipal/government	16	6%
Affiliated for-profit	8	3%
Budget		
Up to $500,000	73	27%

$500,000–$1 mil.	38	14%
$1–3 million	65	24%
Over $3 million	23	9%
Unsure	67	25%

Note: Percentages are based on complete responses for each item.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Participants in Semi-Structured Interviews

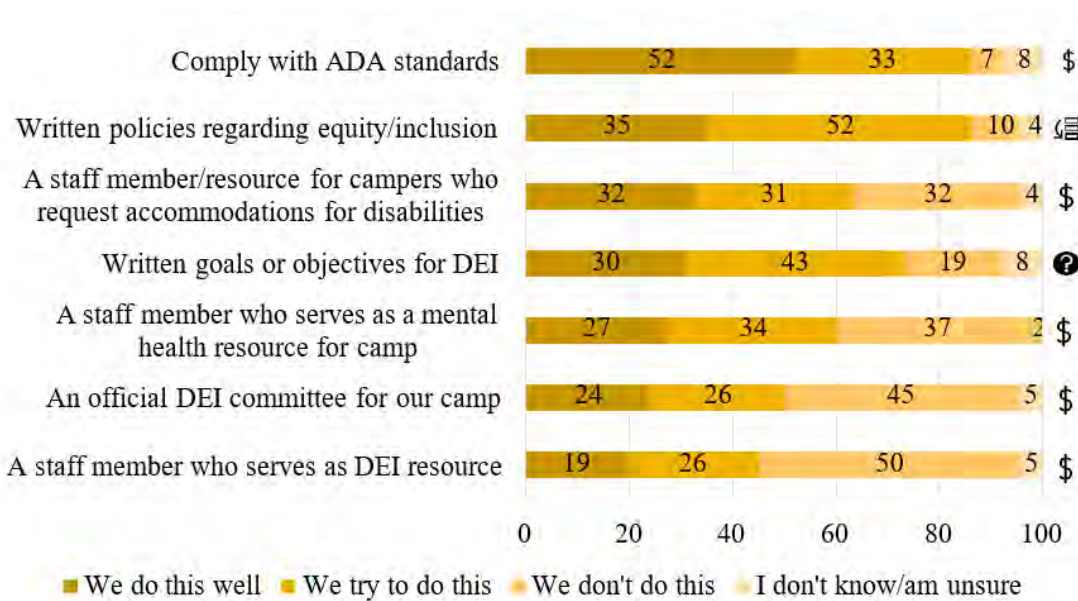| *Demographic Characteristics*	%	*M*	*SD*
Race/Ethnicity			
American Indian or Alaska Native	0		
Asian	0		
Black/African American	0		
Latino/a/x/e or Hispanic	0		
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0		
White (Not Hispanic)	100		
Two or More Races	0		
Gender			
Female	40		
Male	42		
Queer	8		
Age		46.92	9.99

Note: Statistics were calculated based on twelve of nineteen participants who provided demographic information.

The following sections report the percent of camps that camp staff say did a strategy well, tried to do a strategy, did not do a strategy, or did not know whether they did a strategy by category.

Governance and Administration

Figure 1. Percentage of Camps Using Governance and Administration Strategies by Use Category

Strategy	We do this well	We try to do this	We don't do this	I don't know/am unsure
Comply with ADA standards	52	33	7	8 $
Written policies regarding equity/inclusion	35	52	10	4
A staff member/resource for campers who request accommodations for disabilities	32	31	32	4 $
Written goals or objectives for DEI	30	43	19	8 ❷
A staff member who serves as a mental health resource for camp	27	34	37	2 $
An official DEI committee for our camp	24	26	45	5 $
A staff member who serves as DEI resource	19	26	50	5 $

■ We do this well ■ We try to do this ■ We don't do this ■ I don't know/am unsure

Note: The icons in Figures 1-5 represent the mode for why each strategy is not used. $ = We don't currently have adequate resources; ❷ = We are unsure how to do this; ☹ = We are concerned about a lack of community support or staff resistance; ⌨ = Our camp is focused on other priorities. If we had fewer than 10 cases per strategy, we did not report the mode

Benchmarking Strategies

Half of camp staff reported that their camp did well at complying with ADA standards. Many camps were actively working toward having written policies regarding equitable and inclusive practices at camp as well as written goals and objectives for DEI. However, camp staff reported that their camps invest fewer resources into time-intensive staff positions. For example, between a third and a half of camp staff said their camps did not have a staff member or person who serves as a resource for campers with disabilities, a mental health resource for camp, or a DEI resource for camp. Almost half did not have an official DEI committee or working group for camp.

Related Interview Findings

Regarding policy, camp staff stressed that having effective policies in place supported a multitude of DEI strategies. Furthermore, the ability to develop effective policies was a function of administrative support. Updated policy documents reflecting a camp's DEI goals provided a clear reference point when DEI situations arose. These documents often specified both what a camp is and is not prepared to do and reflected the organization's commitment to DEI.

This year, I had a camp call and say, "Hey, we've never had an openly trans camper before. We don't have any policy around that. Here's what our housing situation is. What do we do?" And I said, "Okay. First let's write a policy. And then we'll decide what to do in the situation based on the policy that we write." (White, queer DEI & Access Manager, 35)

Hiring and Training

Figure 2. Percentage of Camps Using Hiring and Training Strategies by Use Category
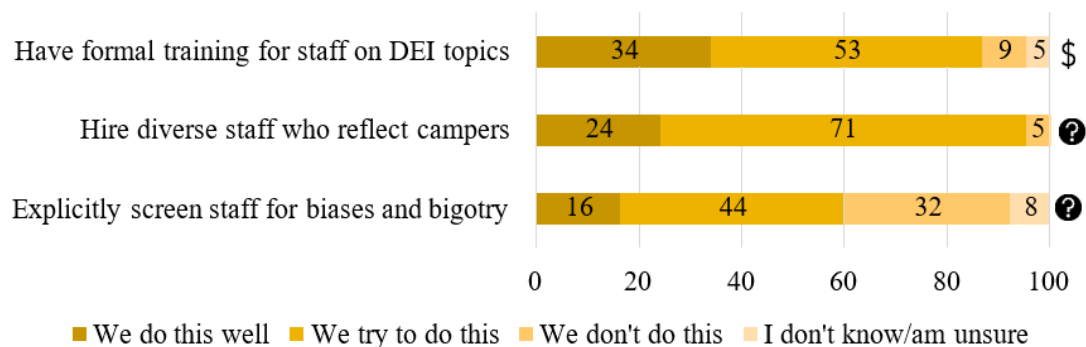
Across all three measures of hiring and training, camp staff most often reported that their camp was trying to use the strategies with fewer reporting that they were doing it well or not doing it. More than a quarter of camp staff reported that their camp was doing well at hiring diverse staff and having formal DEI training. However, a third of camp staff also reported that their camps were not screening staff for biases and bigotry.

Related Interview Findings

When asking to describe effective hiring practices, camp staff who were interviewed reported that many of their hiring strategies align with common practices, such as recruiting through job boards that target employees with particular social identities (e.g., 100 Black Men of America, Inc.) and partnering with nearby institutions, like local colleges. In some cases, camps had board members with diverse identities who either had or were able to build relationships with organizations outside of the camp's traditional recruiting networks. Overall, camps found it easier to recruit diverse seasonal employees, such as camp counselors, than full-time positions because individuals in full-time positions need to live permanently in the community near camp, which may not be welcoming to diverse individuals. However, camps recognized that diverse seasonal employees may also struggle to find culturally relevant activities to do in the local community during their time off.

> We typically do a very good job of hiring diverse staff, particularly at lower levels, but not so much at upper levels of our organization . . . so that has been a focus of our organization the entire time I've been here. But our site is located in a rural part of New Jersey that is not particularly friendly to people of color. They wouldn't see many people [like them] reflected in the townspeople or shop folks, or any of that. (White, female president & CEO, age sixty-four)

Hiring staff with diverse identities is one strategy, but interviewees raised a point about differences between seasonal staff and full-time staff, who often are recruited from different populations and have varying degrees of acceptance and familiarity with DEI.

> We need to focus more, as I said, on intergenerational challenges. How do we get people from my generation to hear what young people are telling us? And vice versa. When I have a conversation with a twenty-five-year-old, to share that my lived experience is that I grew up in the South, and that for fifty-five years, I only had two gender pronouns. As much as I want to say all of them, or use the correct one, I might forget, because my brain actually works this way, rather than "I just don't want to cooperate." (White, female president & CEO, age sixty-four)

Asked to describe formal DEI training, participants reported that training varied by the context where it was held, how it was designed, the focus of the training, the type of training, and the instructional methods used to deliver the DEI training. Additionally, training outcomes varied by camp staff position. Many trainings for camp counselors focused on behavioral outcomes, such as teaching them how to address concerns in the moment with campers. Trainings for full-time staff were more likely to focus on affective (one's attitudes) and knowledge outcomes in addition to behavioral (actions one can take) outcomes (see Bezrukova et al., 2016, for more information on affective, knowledge, and behavioral outcomes). Staff tried to screen potential employees for biases by asking them to describe their values and ensuring they aligned with the camp's values. Often, younger camp counselors readily embraced ideas related to DEI because DEI has been an integral part of their development. In contrast, it took older staff more time to adopt practices that support DEI, such as using preferred pronouns.

Interviewees said it was most effective to have *repetition with DEI trainings*, which included having trainings across all levels of an organization and throughout the season.

> Our DEI committee has listening sessions. Those are throughout the year, at least once a month . . . and they welcome anybody to come to their committee meetings. We've also brought in guest speakers to our committee meetings. . . . We've brought them into our board meetings as well. When it comes to staff, DEI is part of our staff training now. That began this summer during our staff orientation. So, all of that is definitely ingrained. And then we do talk about DEI quite a bit at what we call in service, which is every two weeks halfway through the session. (White, male development director, age thirty-two)

Evaluation

**Figure 3.** Percentage of Camps Using Evaluation Strategies by Use Category
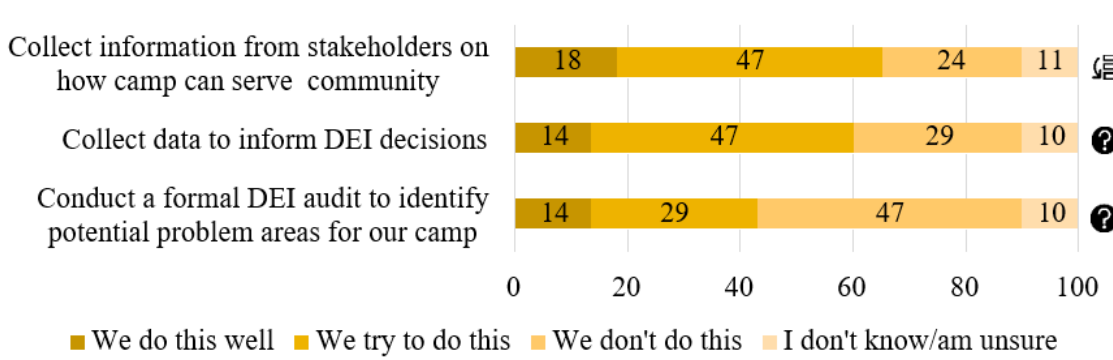
Very few camp staff reported that their camp was doing well at the three evaluation strategies. About half of staff reported that their camps were trying to collect information from community stakeholders about how the camp can serve the community or were trying to collect data to inform DEI decisions. However, almost a third were not using these strategies, and about half of camps had not conducted a formal DEI audit.

Related Interview Findings

These findings were partially explained through interviews where participants noted that to conduct evaluations more effectively, they need better assessment tools. These tools would help them understand what strategies, actions, or changes produced meaningful improvement for participants in their programs.

Programming and Climate

Figure 4. Percentage of Camps Using Programming and Climate Strategies by Use Category
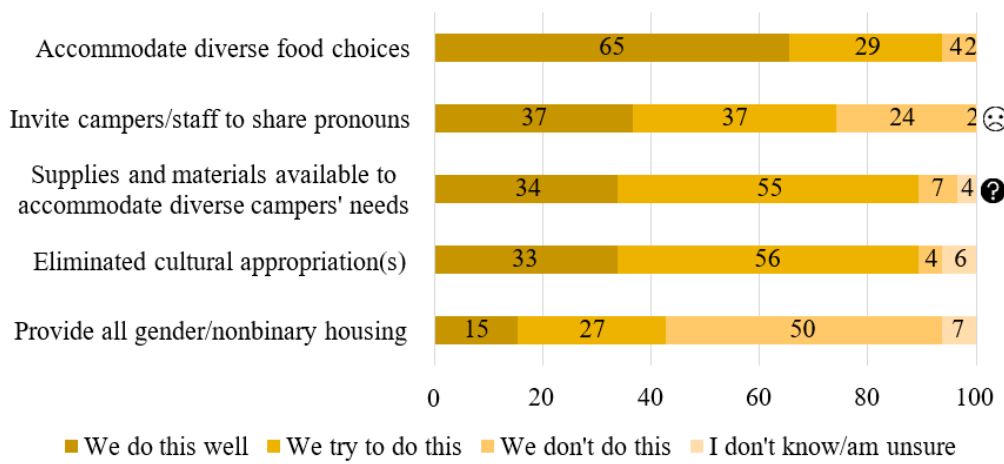
Note: Due to an error in survey logic, participants did not receive follow-up questions for "Provide all-gender/nonbinary housing," so we could not report the mode.

Nearly all camp staff reported that their camp was doing well at or was trying to accommodate diverse food choices. In contrast, only a third of camp staff reported that their camp did well at inviting campers and staff to share pronouns, providing supplies and materials to campers, and eliminating cultural appropriation. Half of camp staff reported that their camp was not providing all-gender or nonbinary housing options, although almost a third were trying to do so and 15 percent did so well.

Related Interview Findings

Interviewees explained that programming and climate were often related to physical aspects of camp. While choices were made by administrators, the effects of those choices were often visible for campers. An example of how interviewees reported changing the climate was using *structural or visual cues to affirm their DEI commitments*, which could include creating ADA-accessible cabins or hanging pride flags in a prominent location. The goal was to use physical space to promote emotional safety.

> What visual cues and other things have other camps have done to, upon arriving, give a family . . . a sense of welcoming because there's a visual cue, whether it's a written sign or just a space or just a way that they see, "Yeah, I feel comfortable here." What is that physical space that I can create that would help to make this place recognizable as a safe space? (White, male camp facilities manager, age fifty-two)

Recruitment and Access

Figure 5. Percentage of Camps Using Recruitment and Access Strategies by Use Category
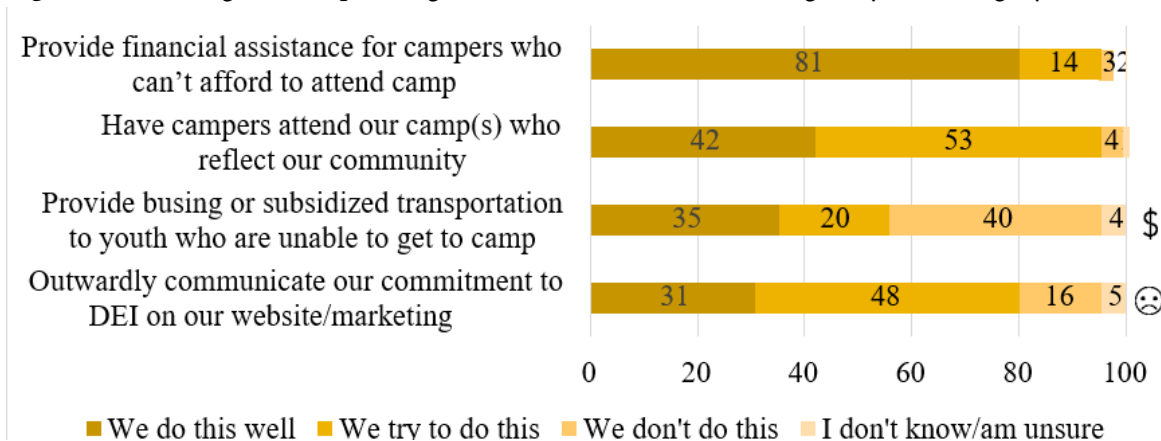
Almost all camp staff report that their camp did well at providing financial assistance to campers or is trying to do well at this strategy. Thirty to forty percent of camp staff reported that their camps did well at the remaining three strategies. About half of camp staff reported that their camps were trying to do well at having campers attend who reflect their community and outwardly communicating their commitment to DEI. However, 40 percent were not providing busing or subsidized transportation to campers.

Related Interview Findings

For interviewees, their ability to effectively recruit participants was related to their communication materials and an enthusiastic support for DEI. While outward communication about their commitment to DEI could focus on representation of underrepresented and diverse campers in marketing, it also meant making a camp's focus on DEI explicit. Interviewees found it especially valuable to be transparent with their DEI goals and communicate them clearly to parents and staff so that all parties know what to expect.

> I encourage people to put that [DEI goals] literally everywhere. We post it on our social media at least every couple of months. There's a reminder that yes, this is who we are, and we do all of these things. One of my favorite examples of how to use it was actually at a camp that got a lot of pushback around queer stuff in 2021. They put it on their registration this year. Parents had to check a box that they had read it before they could register their kids for camp, so that there weren't any parents who were like, "I didn't know that there was going to be a pride flag, or that you let people use other pronouns." (White, queer DEI & access manager, thirty-five)

Additional Strategies from Interviews

Participants who were interviewed shared additional information that was relevant to how they implemented DEI practices. They also identified needs regarding DEI that were not captured through the survey. For example, they wanted better ways to share knowledge about what strategies are effective, such as creating a Black Camp Professionals Association where they could network and gain experience from one another. Camp staff thought it was helpful to have *partnerships and external supports* with other camps and related agencies in their community. These partnerships allowed them to create affinity groups regionally and use external consultants in the area who provided education about DEI.

> Our DEI work really started with a partnership with another organization in the area, and out of the youth work that we did. The partnership was with another organization here. . . . Through that partnership we were able to hire a full-time DEI coordinator, a position that works within our organization, and in terms of educating our staff and assisting with programs. (White, male camp director, age fifty-three)

Camp staff in interviews also identified areas that tend to vary between camps, influencing the camp culture and how ready a camp may be to adopt DEI goals. One area was the camp's *values* and how they do (or do not) align with camper values, parent or caregiver values, and values within the local community, which can influence how readily the camp adopts DEI practices. A liberal camp, for example, might make slow progress in order not to alienate more conservative campers and their parents or caregivers.

> We are located in a very, very conservative county, and we have encountered quite a bit of pushback from parents about our inclusion policy and our level of openness and acceptingness at camp. We had a parent in the driveway screaming at us on Sunday night because they didn't like our inclusion. . . . We are in a rural, very not diverse community that is heavily conservative. (White, female CEO, age forty-three)

These differences lead to differences in pacing, or the rate at which camps adopt DEI policies. Some camps might want to adopt new DEI practices but realize that they could be creating an unsafe environment for campers or

camp staff where there is an illusion of DEI that has not been fully actualized or where they would alienate current campers.

> In general, I think easing into it is going to be the best way, and I don't. . . It's not how I would prefer to do it. But I don't know. I feel like we have to kind of meet people where they're at, and I don't wanna push some people so far that we like exclude a lot of our returning families or people who are like, "This is new. This has never happened here before." (White, female associate executive director, age thirty)

Summary

In the survey, the strategies that respondents *most often* reported that their camps were doing well were providing financial assistance, accommodating diverse food choices, complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and serving campers who reflect their community. The strategies that camps *most often* said they were trying to do include having written policies, goals and objectives for DEI, hiring diverse staff and training staff on DEI, using evaluation strategies, providing supplies and materials to accommodate diverse campers' needs, eliminating cultural appropriation, having campers who reflect their community attend their camp, and communicating their commitment to DEI on their website or in marketing. Of the strategies listed, the ones *least* likely to be used by camps were providing all-gender and nonbinary housing options, having a staff member who serves as a DEI resource, conducting a formal DEI audit, having an official DEI committee, or working group, and providing busing or subsidized transportation to campers. When camps did not use a strategy, they most commonly reported that they did not use it because they did not have adequate resources followed by a lack of community support or staff resistance, being unsure how to use the strategy, or being focused on other priorities (see icons in Figures 1–5).

The semi-structured interview data largely complemented these findings, although with more detail and nuance. Interviewees spoke about the importance of governance and administration, specifically the need for a supportive board and management who could oversee a DEI committee and working group. They reported that staff training was effective when it involved discussions, specific activities, and scenarios with takeaways that could be applied immediately, and they valued training that was led by an outside facilitator. Camper recruitment often depended on word of mouth, inclusive and diverse marketing materials, and partnering with schools to reach audiences that were not already connected to camp. Barriers to using strategies included whether a camp had the resources (both time and financial) or knowledge about implementing the strategy.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to conduct a benchmarking survey to determine which DEI strategies camps use most and least frequently. By understanding which strategies are used most frequently, we can ask additional, more complex questions, such as why these strategies are used and whether they are the most effective. When we tried to narrow in on specific strategies through semi-structured interviews, participants described how multiple DEI strategies worked in tandem, making it difficult to isolate the impact of any strategy. For example, it is difficult to work in one category of strategy, such as hiring and training, without also having support in some of the other categories, such as governance and administration. However, there may be a progression where camps adopt early, well-established DEI strategies before moving into more resource-intensive strategies. Realistically, a camp cannot make progress simultaneously across all strategies and must identify a starting point. Future research could examine this evolution and offer guidance to camps to understand where they are in their DEI journey and what next steps may support their DEI growth. For instance, offering diverse food choices and scholarships are examples of common strategies that 65 percent and 81 percent of camps use well, respectively. However, less-used, resource-intensive strategies, such as having staff members dedicate their time to supporting the needs of diverse campers or having a DEI working committee, are only used well by around 25 percent of camps. Moreover, it was evident that camps made less progress on DEI strategies related to politically polarized topics, such as all-gender housing options and using personal pronouns (cf. Clark, 2022).

The information on why DEI strategies are not being utilized is also useful. If value-based conflicts are unresolvable, camp professionals might make progress on other fronts if community grants or donors can support

DEI strategies primarily limited by funding. Likewise, if financial resources are not available, implementation of some strategies might be effectively addressed through education and available resources, or through shared knowledge and networks from camps and partner organizations in adjacent spaces.

Despite the importance of adopting new DEI efforts, camps face challenges such as limited resources in addition to a lack of knowledge about implementation and, in some cases, staff and community resistance to DEI. Because some decisions about DEI strategies can redirect resources from other opportunities within a camp, administrators need assurance that their investment in DEI will bring about meaningful changes. However, current evaluation tools are limited, making it difficult for administrators to assess the impact of DEI strategies on their camp's culture and highlighting the need for further research in this area. Interestingly, while staff reported success with certain strategies in the survey, when asked directly in interviews how they measured success, several were unable to provide an answer. These findings underscore the importance of developing effective evaluation tools.

Camp staff who participated in interviews acknowledged that the success of DEI strategies depended on the camp's values as well as the values of the surrounding community and the campers it serves. Figure 6 is a visual representation of the relationships that emerged through this study between three stakeholders (camp, community, and parent/caregivers) that affect how rapidly a camp is likely to adopt DEI practices. For example, a camp might aim to adopt more inclusive policies, but doing so could potentially alienate its camper population if they have different values, leading to declining enrollment. Not all camps viewed this as a negative outcome, however. Rather, allowing the camper population to adjust to the camp's DEI values could lead to meaningful shifts in the camp's culture. However, differences between the camp's values and the local community could lead to other challenges. In the case of overnight camps, full-time staff members are often recruited from the local community. If a camp is more liberal than the community where it is located, it may struggle to hire full-time staff whose values are in alignment with the camp. Additionally, if a camp successfully recruits diverse staff members, it can be hard to retain them if they do not feel included within the local community. This means that although a camp may be willing to embrace DEI, the ability to do so or the pace of change may depend on various external factors.

Figure 6. How Interactions Between Camp, Community, and Camper Values Influences DEI
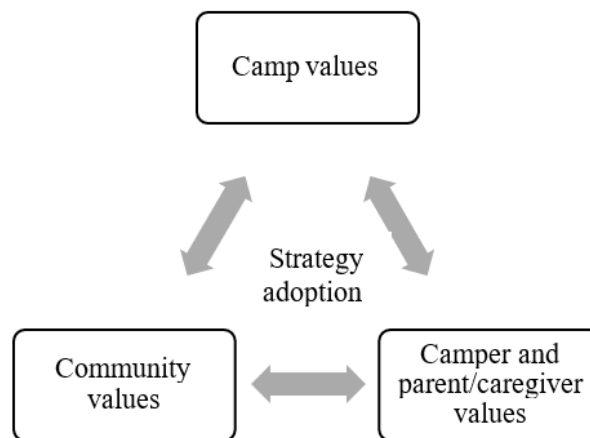
Strategy Adoption

Finally, DEI strategies are interconnected and reinforcing. According to camp staff, having updated policy documents with current DEI goals in place made it easier to be transparent about these goals with staff, campers, and parents/caregivers. Transparent goals and policies also led to DEI training focused on this content, which could be revisited throughout a camp season, and changes to the physical environment, such as displaying LGBTQ+ pride flags in a dining hall. Therefore, progress in one area could lead to iterative changes across a camp. However, while some camp staff praised the networks they had to share information, others acknowledged that more ways to share knowledge and additional DEI tools would be crucial to their ability to work toward greater DEI goals.

Limitations

The survey was administered to camp staff members who held varying degrees of familiarity with their camp's DEI practices, and as such the data reflects their individual perceptions of how well their camp implements specific strategies. Moreover, the determination of whether a camp "did well" with a particular strategy was based on the subjective perspective of the survey respondent, as opposed to a standardized definition of what constitutes success. Therefore, it is important to interpret these findings as a broad and subjective perspective on how camps approach DEI strategies, rather than a definitive evaluation of the effectiveness of said strategies.

Throughout this paper and the associated survey, we use the term "diverse" to refer to a range of social identities. However, this approach limited our ability to explore the specific strategies employed for different populations. Future research could benefit from focusing on specific populations, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of their unique histories, challenges, needs, and opportunities. It is also important to acknowledge that while demographic   data regarding the camps was collected, demographic information about the survey respondents was not obtained. As a result, it is likely that the survey sample represents the dominant identities among camp staff, potentially resulting in the underrepresentation of the perspectives of diverse individuals. The findings should be interpreted with this limitation in mind. Given the potential for self-reported data to reflect inaccuracies, future research on DEI strategies could be conducted using external evaluation techniques. The strategies assessed in this survey have been identified from camp staff as important (cf. Spielvogel et al., 2023), but that does not mean that they are the best or most effective strategies. Additional research on the ability of strategies to effect change is also needed.

Conclusion

In promoting DEI, camps employ various strategies to differing degrees. Generally, established strategies may be more easily adopted than newer or resource-intensive ones, which was reflected in the frequency of strategies used. Overall, progress in one area can have a positive impact on progress in other areas, which should encourage camps to begin somewhere, knowing that one step forward can lead to more steps in the direction of positive change. Taken together, the number of strategies a camp uses and the degree to which they use them well indicate how prepared a camp is to grow in DEI. However, the pace of change may be influenced by the values of the campers, parents or caregivers, and the community where the camp is situated, even if the camp is willing to take new steps toward implementing DEI goals.

Callout: Action Items for Camps

As a benchmarking study of United States camps, practitioners and programmers can compare their own camps to the data presented in this paper. They can consider the following questions: Is their camp is using these DEI strategies differently than other camps? If so, are the differences easily explained? Or do they represent opportunities for improvement for their camp?

Additional resources include:

- American Camp Association: Creating Inclusive Camps Tool

- Camp Fire: Thriving Through Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

- Go Camp PRO: Diversity at Day Camp

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