

directions

Journal of the Association of Nature Center Administrators

A Flutter of Excitement

ANCA's 24th annual Summit will be held September 19th-23rd in McAllen, Texas. Our host, Quinta Mazatlan World Birding Center, is busy planning lots of not-to-be-missed experiences! So, if you've been dreaming of checking these things off your bucket list: • attending a conference just for nature center leaders • starting relationships with about 150 nature and environmental learning center administrators • joining a global network of 650 nature center leaders • hearing about the latest trends in the nature center field • exploring the nature center network in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas • spending quality time in a beautiful 1930s adobe mansion on 20 acres of conserved land where 230 bird and butterfly species can be spotted... then the ANCA DREAM BIG SUMMIT 2018 is for you!



Green-breasted mango (Anthracothorax prevostii)
photo by Kathy & sam

John Brush
Urban Ecologist
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One of the most exciting things as a bird watcher is the rare bird. If it falls during the right season, or the bird is particularly rare, it can create a flutter (pun fully intended) of great proportion in the world of bird watching. One of my fondest birdwatching memories happened during the 2013 Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival, and demonstrated the perfect confluence of timing and a bird of “mega”

rarity status.

The bird was an Amazon kingfisher, found on the second-to-last day of the festival. Given that it was only the second ABA area record of the species, many of the scheduled field trips made last-minute route adjustments, and festival participants flooded to a resaca (a waterway similar to an ox-bow lake) in Cameron County (TX). It was amusing, exciting, and frankly a little bit of a safety concern being in that excited crowd of birdwatchers.

We waited patiently for the bird to reappear, chat-

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Founded in 1989, the Association of Nature Center Administrators is a private non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and supporting best leadership and management practices for nature and environmental learning centers.

Serving more than 630 members, ANCA is the leader in the profession.



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Why did the javelina cross the road? To get to the 2018 ANCA Summit in McAllen, TX of course!



Director's Notes

Prolific Spring (and winter and summer....)

Jen Levy
Executive Director
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Logan, UT

Greetings from the ANCA Office! It is that time of year here in northern Utah when we enjoy the benefits of winter and spring. I skied on Sunday in beautiful spring conditions and planted peas, lettuce, and spinach last night after work. Tonight, I will put onions in the ground and I look forward to more skiing this weekend. Spring's arrival is being celebrated throughout the ANCA network and it has been fun following Facebook and Instagram posts highlighting the myriad signs of spring.

The arrival of spring also means many of our members are in the final stages of planning their summer camps and in this issue of *Directions*, we are exploring summer camp readiness. Two of our Business Partners, Doubleknot and CampDoc, contributed articles with tips and strategies for registration, communications, camp check-in, and the use of technology to improve camper health records. Cincinnati Nature Center, our 2019 Summit Host, has been offering summer camps for many years providing experiential environmental education in a fun and safe environment. Read all about it starting on Page 8.

Eve Smallwood, CincyNature Camp Director, describes how they strengthened the community and relationships within their 30-mem-



ber camp staff and 65 Leaders-in-Training resulting in an improved experience for their staff and campers. I have very fond memories of summers spent at a camp in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains and believe my time at camp contributed to my love of nature and my comfort in the outdoors. Kids need summer camp and our members play an important role in providing this vital piece of childhood. Happy Camping!

Here in the ANCA office we are looking ahead, past summer, to September when we will join ANCA members and Business Partners at the 2018 Dream Big Summit, September 19-23 in McAllen, TX. Our hosts, Quinta Mazatlan World Birding Center & Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas Partners, have been hard at work planning the programs, field trips, food, and fun.

If you've been dreaming of checking these things off your bucket list:

- Attending a conference just for nature center leaders

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- Hearing about the latest trends in the nature center field
- Sharing your successes, challenges, and questions with your peers
- Exploring the nature center network in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas
- Attending a conference in a beautiful 1930s adobe mansion on 20 acres of conserved land where 230 bird and butterfly species can be spotted

... then the ANCA DREAM BIG SUMMIT 2018 is for you!

We will announce registration for the Summit in late April – look for emails from @natctr.org in your Inbox. We hope you will join us!

We are also planning for the future of ANCA and recently completed a strategic planning process to answer the question, “what should ANCA achieve by 2025?” In February the ANCA staff and board met in Monteagle, TN to develop our strategic priorities for the next seven years. Using data gathered at the ANCA Summit and through member surveys, we developed ANCA’s Vision of Success – see Page 7.

In addition to our four vision statements we wrote strategies that are needed to achieve the vision of success and action plans that outline tasks that must be accomplished to complete a strategy. How will we get all this work done? With a Champion! Our facilitator, Corky McReynolds of LeadTeam Consulting, recommended we identify a Strategic Plan Champion. The champion is the person that becomes the link between the stated

actions of the plan and the people who are identified in its implementation. The champion becomes the strategic plan’s ambassador. Our ambassador is ANCA board member Brooks Paternotte, executive director of the Irvine Nature Center in MD. Brooks will work with Iain MacLeod, ANCA board chair, and myself to keep the plan moving along and identify the resources we need along the way. You can read about Brooks’ experience participating in the ANCA strategic planning process as well as planning at his own center on Page 6.

So what will we be working on? In the first several months of the plan we will be developing plans to better secure ANCA’s financial stability. Strengthened organizational capacity will be critical if we want to continue to meet current and future objectives. In response to the theme of ‘engaging community’ that emerged from ANCA member input we will be seeking Diversity/Equity/Inclusion training for our board as well as programming for our membership that educates, supports, and encourages DEI practices. In order to maintain a suite of delivery methods to provide resources for leaders and aspiring leaders, we are inviting new members to our Marketing Committee and tasking them with evaluating and improving our communications. First up, the ANCA website re-design project is on schedule to begin in the next few months. Echoing Brooks’ comments in his article, I hope ANCA members can be engaged in the process through feedback and action. I look forward to hearing from you! 



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ting and exhibiting the general social nature of these rare bird sightings. Soon enough, the kingfisher was seen flying towards us, low over the water. The safety concern came in when the bird flew across the road to the other section of resaca, and was quickly followed on foot by the horde of birders, who from my recollection, paid little more than lip service to checking for vehicles. Not much later, the bird flew back across the road, and again was followed by the eager avian enthusiasts. Over the next few days it got to the point where local county sheriffs came out to help slow the traffic passing by, all because of one twelve-inch bird.

That memory bubbled up because of two recent rarities at Quinta Mazatlan World Birding Center in McAllen, Texas, where I happen to have the pleasure of working. The two rarities were a green-breasted mango and a blue bunting, both typically found in Mexico and Central America – they are considered “Code 4” rarities by the American Birding Association, with extinct species being “Code 6.”

The mango is a large hummingbird that hadn't been seen in the US since 2009, and only recorded about 20 times prior, and the blue bunting (similar in size and general appearance to the abundant indigo bunting in much of the eastern half of the US) has only been recorded 51 times. While the mango left after a little over a week from its early December discovery, the blue bunting filled the rare bird void a few weeks later on December 30th, and remains on-site as I write this.

Now, to find rare birds is just

that – rare. These are birds that exhibit one or more of the following: 1) out of their normal range, 2) have small population size, or 3) are out of season. It helps to have experience with local birds, to know that something is “different” about it, and it helps even more if you've had previous experience with the species, but really it depends on the small chance of being at the right place at the right time. It also takes some luck in whether they stay in the vicinity, so that after the text messages,



Blue bunting (Cyanocompsa parellina)
photo by Dominic Sherony

social media posts, e-mails, and phone calls go out, the bird can be re-sighted by others.

While it is lucky to find these individual rarities, on a larger scale rare bird sightings are regular occurrences throughout our region (we're blessed by proximity to the tropics in Mexico) and around the United States; both having a significant impact on ecotourism.

Take the green-breasted mango

and blue bunting as a couple local examples, keeping in mind that they aren't even mega-rarities like the aforementioned Amazon kingfisher (ABA Code 5). Those two birds have helped bump the number of out-of-town visitors (staying in local hotels) coming to Quinta Mazatlan from 337 in 2016-2017 (Dec, Jan, Feb) to 2,303 during the same period in 2018 – roughly 7 times greater! As part of a continuing survey, we calculated this led to a 79% increase in economic impact, and that roughly 81% of these visits are birders. All that just represents out-of-town visitors staying in hotels – we also have Winter Texans who are encouraged by the cooperative nature of the blue bunting (you just have to sit at a feeding station and wait) along with locals who may visit the park multiple times to get better views of the bird.

Another advantage of rare birds is what I like to call the “many-eyes” effect. As more birdwatchers arrive to find the one rarity, it often follows that other interesting birds are spotted as well. Most likely these additional birds aren't as unusual as the original rarity, but they may either add extra incentive to visit, or drive repeat visits. For example, while the blue bunting has frequented our grounds, we've also had visitors spot a Townsend's warbler and two western tanagers, both of which are rather uncommon during winter in our area.

It also encourages out-of-town visitors to check out other local nature centers – Quinta Mazatlan offers a hand-out that promotes the other World Birding Center sites,

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Flutter (continued from page 4)

and our staff also give word-of-mouth recommendations, helping to grow the local nature network. A report done through Texas A&M University and their AgriLIFE Extension helps show the large impact of nature tourism in the Rio Grande Valley as a whole; a total county-level impact of \$463 million dollars and over 6,600 full- and part-time jobs annually.

We know the importance of birdwatchers to ecotourism, and therefore the value of rare birds, so the question becomes; how can we get rare birds to our sites?



Quinta Mazatlan is an historical adobe mansion and nature and birding center located in McAllen, Texas and will be hosting ANCA's 2018 Summit Sept. 19-23.

Unfortunately, it again is mostly luck. But I believe there are a couple ways to increase your odds. First, get a qualified bird-watcher to dedicate time to really birding your area regularly, aside from regularly scheduled bird walks. This person could be a staff member you hire or a local birder who is willing to volunteer their

time (as birdwatchers often are). Second, remember that rare birds have all the same requirements: food, water, cover – all the habitat requirements. Quinta Mazatlan is a relatively small urban woodland (20 acres), so we try to increase the diversity of habitats on our grounds while still maintaining our thorn-forest origins.

It is a great responsibility to steward our habitat so that future generations can find more mangos and enjoy the great kiskadees, green jays, Altamira orioles, and many other birds that live in and migrate through the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Rare

birds, and the ecotourism they promote, help accomplish that feat.

For more information about birds, backyard stewardship, and more please *click here*.

For more information about the ANCA Dream Big Summit 2018 *click here*. 🌿

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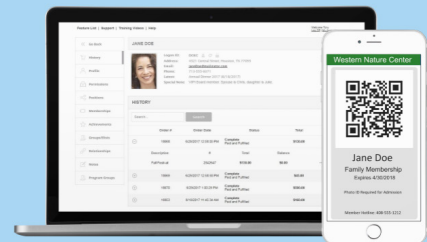


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Profile:

It's Best Not to Wing It ~ Planning for the Future Right Now

Brooks Paternotte
Executive Director
Irvine Nature Center
Owings Mills, MD

When I first arrived at Irvine Nature Center nearly five years ago I was charged with three major initiatives: eliminate deficit spending by increasing program income, complete a successful endowment campaign, and craft Irvine's next strategic plan. While the first two items came more naturally, the last was the most daunting.

I had participated in strategic planning as a teacher and school administrator, but I had never taken a lead role in the process. Now was my chance. We formed our committee of staff and board members, engaged a consultant, and scheduled two retreats. Vision and mission were articulated; stakeholder groups were interviewed; and staff and board established the bold initiatives under which our goals and objectives would fall. Action items, timelines, and responsibilities were assigned, and our work began in earnest.

Since then we have used the plan as our guide as we have navigated both anticipated items and unforeseen challenges. We witnessed the plan's evolution and maintained it as a living document, incorporating new action items and updating work plans accordingly. As the three-year mark in the plan approached, we gathered a group of trustees and


staff to evaluate our progress and determine the best path forward. The reinvigorated strategic planning committee found that our bold initiatives had not changed, but we had accomplished many of the goals and objectives set forth in the current plan. We determined that an update was merited, and the current plan's life could be extended by 18-24 months. At this point a new consultant was engaged to help facilitate the plan's update before, during, and after a strategic planning retreat with board and senior staff.

We have now completed the retreat and are working on a draft plan to present to our trustees for feedback in April. In the interim, we are making sure that action plans are developed and tasks are assigned and tracked – every board committee and staff meeting has a time in the agenda dedicated to strategic planning updates, revisions, or discussion.

So why share all of this with you? Two reasons: first, Irvine wanted to follow the best practices for nature centers using ANCA's established guidelines, and second, ANCA is in the same process of planning for the future right now. Many of you responded to last year's survey or participated in focus groups at the 2017 Summit in Alabama and we appreciate your input. More recently the ANCA board and staff met for its winter meeting and strategic planning retreat in Tennessee to begin distilling all of the feedback into a coherent plan for the next several years.

I had the unique opportunity of simultaneously leading a plan for a nature center while participating in the planning at a more macro level for all of us. What made the two experiences more enriching was the opportunity to work with the same consultant, Corky McReynolds, for both Irvine and ANCA on back-to-back weekends. In addition, fellow ANCA board member and Ijams Nature Center ED, Amber Parker, also worked with Corky this winter on their strategic plan. What an amazing opportunity to share and compare!

Now that the dust has settled from the retreats and plans have taken shape, it is incumbent on leadership to ensure that tasks are assigned and the goals and objectives achieved over the long term. As part of the continuation and implementation of any plan, a Strategic Plan Champion should be identified to help the executive director and board chair move the plan forward. After begging the other 12 ANCA board members to do this and being turned down, Iain finally got a "yes" from me.

In my role as the plan champion, I look forward to working closely with Jen, Iain, and board committee chairs to keep the plan on track and relevant. I also hope that our members, both current and future, feel obligated to review the plan, offer suggestions, and take action. It will help you when the time comes to lead your own strategic planning and it will contribute to us all professionally. 

Association of Nature Center Administrator's 2018 Strategic Plan Highlights

Vision: By 2025, ANCA will...

1. Have organizational capacity and financial stability to meet its current and future objectives.

2. Maintain best practices that promote diversity, equity, and inclusiveness within our membership and the profession.

3. Continue to recognize and promote its core values while responding & adapting to trends within the dynamic profession.

4. Be the leading source for professional development tools and relevant resources for leaders and aspiring leaders in the nature and environmental center field.

Strategies:

1.1. Identify, plan for, and secure the components for our financial sustainability.
1.2. Identify, plan for, and secure the components for our organizational capacity.

2.1. Educate ourselves about the issues and practices around DEI.
2.2. Develop plan for implementing DEI Best Practices for ANCA and our members.
2.3. Create a diverse, equitable, and inclusive ANCA membership.

3.1. Revisit/redefine ANCA's core values.
3.2. Communicate core values to the ANCA membership.
3.3. Facilitate member networking for sharing emerging trends & initiatives.
3.4. Periodically seek trends affecting the nature center profession within and outside our field.

4.1. Maintain a suite of delivery methods to provide resources for leaders and aspiring leaders.
4.2. Regularly evaluate delivery methods for effectiveness and seek new ideas and resources.



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From The Field:

Preparing for Summer Camp ~ 3 articles

- modeling community • strategies to streamline • health records

Modeling Community at Summer Camp

Eve Smallwood
CincyNature Camp Director
Cincinnati Nature Center
Cincinnati, OH

At the end of last summer's day camp season at Cincinnati Nature Center, I looked around contentedly at our end-of-camp celebration. Counselors from our four different camp locations and many teen Leaders-in-Training (LITs) were engaged in activities together all around me; some played amped up versions of our camp games, others ate s'mores and played guitars around a campfire, and a small crew of people headed to the creek to search for water snakes and crayfish. Still others talked in small groups, sharing favorite stories of their campers and the natural world they explored over the last three months. The sights and sounds of a unified team of camp staff and volunteers who were celebrating a successful summer of inspiring our campers' passion for nature filled me with a sense of happiness and accomplishment. This celebration marked more than simply one successful summer; it was a large step forward in a plan we implemented to build community with camp staff and LITs, and to increase consistency of quality and proce-

dures within our camp program.

Only a few years ago, the end of our camp season looked quite different. Sure, our counselors and LITs celebrated, but in small groups at their respective camp locations. The counselors from our Long Branch Farm & Trails site never really met the counselors



Counselors learning how to hold a frog
photo courtesy of Cincinnati Nature Center

from our Fernwood Shelter site, and most of the rest of our camp leaders were contract employees that ran a few camps each summer on themes about which they were very passionate. Each camp location was operated by a different camp director with their own plan for staff training and operations. While this system worked fine and provided wonderful experiences for our campers, we saw an opportunity to do better.

Camp programs provide an

inclusive community for our campers with a network of social support. Within the context of providing positive, hands-on experiences in nature that develop and strengthen campers' authentic connections with the natural world, we also help campers learn skills for life – skills that can help them become active, contributing members of their communities and champions of the environment – such as interpersonal skills, self-confidence, and creative problem solving. Camp staff and LITs are role models for the campers; they celebrate the exploration and wonderment of the natural world, which helps campers feel encouraged and supported to do the same. This social support system and mentorship in nature is an important part of many youth's paths to becoming future conservationists.

At our camps, we realized we were providing this important aspect for our campers, but were not doing enough to do the same for our counselors and LITs. By running our camps separately, we were missing an opportunity to create a larger social network and support system with our camp staff and volunteers. Changing our model might help us bring staff together into a larger community

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full of passion, creativity, and team support. A new model could ensure camp staff were getting consistent training and messaging, while still embracing the unique gifts each different camp location had to offer. Camp families could expect dependable quality, regardless of the staff leading their camper's session. We hoped changes could also bring about an improved registration experience and more efficient management of processes like scheduling, hiring, planning time, and purchasing of materials. Communication could improve, systems could be more effective, and staff time (including mine!) could be used to focus on other improvements once these changes were operational.

We developed a three-year implementation plan that combined what we were already doing well (this information came primarily from program evaluation and through the lens of best practices) with our vision for the future. We decided to combine the oversight of our different camps under one camp director, who would work with key staff on the camp big picture and preparing for camp – from creating the content for the camp brochure to determining registration processes to hiring staff. While we were sad to lose some of our passionate contract camp leaders who could not commit to a whole summer, we replaced the contract camps with a larger group of counselors who work together at our Rowe Visitor Center site for the whole summer. This new system was challenging

at times – some people disagreed with the plan, and there was a big learning curve for me. In the end, our dedicated belief in the end goal kept us on track, and our camp program is now the better for it.

Last year, for the first time, we brought our camp staff together to one location for our first few days of training. Long Branch Farm & Trails counselors got to know Fernwood Shelter and Rowe Visitor Center counselors as they learned together about camp safety



Counselors & Leaders in Training at closing campfire
photo courtesy of Cincinnati Nature Center

procedures, group management techniques, fun camp games, and interpreting the natural world. Then throughout the summer we held community-building opportunities outside of camp for counselors from all of our sites – and we invited the LITs, too! Counselors from different sites planned their own get-togethers, from trail running after work to weekend camping trips.

Staff who have worked at our camp program since before the changes have remarked how much better they like the new, inclusive camp model. They tell me it is easier to communicate and generate ideas with other coun-

selors, they feel like everyone has gotten the same training and are applying consistent approaches for things like camper safety and group management, and it is fun to get to know and spend time with other nature-loving counselors from our other sites, who before they may have only gotten to hear about from campers who go to multiple sites each summer. They also feel they know the LITs better since they have become more involved in our community-building activities. From a camp director perspective, I love this model – it helps me work more efficiently, feel confident in the quality of our camp program, provide better customer service from registration processes to camp implementation, and empower staff and LITs to come up and implement their own ideas to improve our camps!

At the end of February, I met with our camp leadership team to dig into planning for this summer. We excitedly discussed ways to build up our staff and LIT supportive network even more – starting with incorporating our teen LIT training with our camp staff training, so we can start growing this community from the very beginning.

By strengthening the community and relationships within our camp staff and volunteers, we ultimately provide a better experience for our campers and increase opportunities for everyone – staff, campers, and LITs – to feel supported by a network of nature-lovers, which we hope may ultimately help even more people to be active in caring for the environment in the future. 🌱

Strategies to Streamline Summer Programs

Elissa Miller
Communications Director
Doubleknot
Saratoga, CA

Summer camps and youth programs are more than just a reliable revenue source: they're one of the most effective ways that your nature center delivers your mission. The best camps build happy memories, instill positive values and help grow a new generation of supporters.

To ensure that your staff is free to focus on delivering great programs, here are a few actions you can take to simplify and streamline every aspect of camp administration—from communications to registration and all the way to check-in, check-out and end-of-season follow-ups.

Get Honest Feedback

The people who participated in your programs—office staff, program leaders, counselors, volunteers and/or families—are the best source of information about what worked well last year...and what didn't.

A common request is for improved arrival, check-in and departure procedures, when hundreds of families may arrive at the same time and create frustrating bottlenecks. You might also learn that important information was not adequately communicated, such as parking instructions, lunch information and dress requirements. In fact, you're likely to discover that you have enough information to create an FAQ for campers and families, which is covered later in this article.

Determine Effective Pricing and Payment Strategies

Before you can open registration, you must set your pricing: Will your rates be the same as last year? To fill the camp faster, do you want to offer early registration discounts, discounts for multiple sessions or special pricing for members or returning families? Will you offer payment schedules so families can pay in installments?

The final pricing structure should address your administrative needs while remaining easy for families to understand. If you offer payment schedules, make sure that you clearly communicate due dates, penalties and the amount due for each installment. Choosing a system that sends automatic billing reminders eliminates the need to run reports, manually calculate balances, create and send invoices and follow up on late or missing payments.

If your membership management software is integrated with your registration, member discounts can be automatically applied. (This is discussed in more detail in the next section.)

Make Membership Meaningful
Ideally, membership and education work together as a "virtuous circle"—families become members to qualify for discounts on education programs (like summer camps), and the education programs are so enjoyable that family memberships are renewed every year.

The easiest way to apply member benefits to summer camp signup is to use a system that supports both registration and memberships. When members are logged on, the system recognizes their membership status and automatically applies their member benefits.

Some integrated systems even allow you to promote membership during registration. For example, the Houston Zoo's camp signup pages show the savings that members receive on the registration. Visitors can click the link to buy a membership and immediately get the member discount on a camp registration in the same purchase. Other possible member incentives include priority early registration for members or setting aside a number of spaces in each session that can only be filled by members.

Centralize Communications

After gathering feedback from your stakeholders (see "Get Honest Feedback," above), you may have enough information to publish a list of frequently asked questions (FAQ). FAQs increase customer satisfaction because families can find all the information they need at any time. Publish the FAQ and everything else about your summer programs in a single location so that there's one easy-to-find web page where visitors know to look.

To reduce miscommunication, make sure that everyone who answers the phone or replies to emails about camp knows where to find the correct information. Staff responding to email should be able to copy and paste answers into their replies, and direct families to the camp information page on your web site. Ask staff to let you know when they receive a question that isn't in the FAQ so you can continuously improve your materials.

Warm Up to Waitlists

When your mail-in registrations

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exceed your available space, someone must disappoint the families and return their payments. And, parents are frustrated when they find that the camp their child selected is already full. A good online registration system can help eliminate these issues by displaying up-to-date capacity information for each session on your website. This helps families avoid unhappy surprises and encourages families to complete a registration if the sessions they want are closing quickly.

Because summer schedules can change quickly, you may have unexpected last-minute openings. Encourage families to join waitlists (and don't collect payment unless they clear the waitlist in the future). If you decide to offer waitlists, clearly communicate your waitlist policy so families understand that they're registering for a waitlist and how they'll be notified if space is available.

Automatic waitlist management can move campers off the waitlist and into the program in the right order so your camps are always full and your families are treated fairly. A good system will also let you manually override capacity if needed to accommodate unusual circumstances.

Simplify Registration Forms

Handling forms may be the most tiresome part of the registration process, but you can do quite a few things to make the task easier for families and staff. If you're distributing your forms as printable PDFs, use an editing tool like Acrobat or PDFill to create interactive forms. Families will appreciate the convenience of typing directly into the fields and printing the completed form, and your staff will appreciate not having to

decipher handwriting.

If you offer online registration, online forms are the easiest way to collect registration data, eliminating the many steps of printing, returning and tracking the forms as well as the need to manually follow up on families with missing or incomplete information. Some online registration solutions let you identify certain forms as mandatory so the registration can't be completed without filling out the necessary waivers.

Streamline Check-in and Checkout

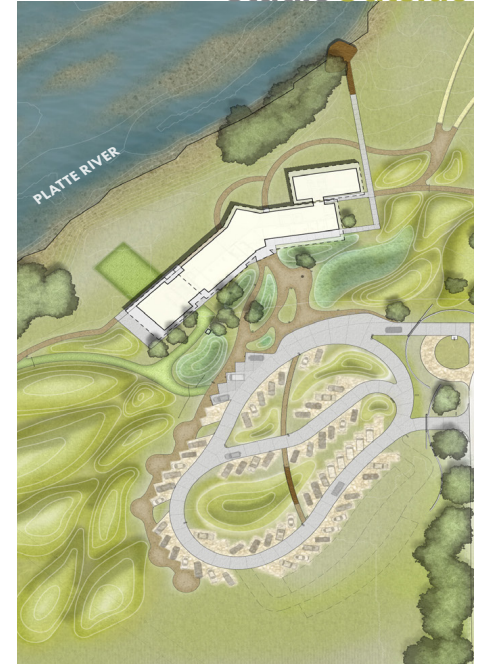
One way to increase customer satisfaction with your summer programs is to make sure that check-in doesn't become a bottleneck, especially on the first day of camp. Keep in mind that the customer experience begins before families even park their cars! Make sure that parking instructions are clearly communicated in advance, and if necessary place staff members in the parking lot to direct traffic.

New technologies are making it possible to avoid long lines for paper-based check-in. For example, if you have a mobile check-in and payment app that's integrated with your registration software, staff can look up registrations, ensure that all materials are submitted and check kids in quickly without having to flip through manila folders. Because any staff member can check in any family, you eliminate the need to create lines that are alphabetized by last name. These solutions also make it fast and easy to update information like authorized pickup people; enter last-minute add-ons like meal plans and after-care; sell merchandise on the spot; and collect payment for any balance due without requiring program staff to handle cash or checks.

In summary, early planning and

effective technology can minimize administration so your nature center can focus on what really matters: delivering an excellent camp experience! 🌿

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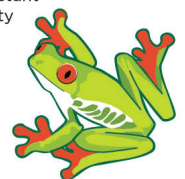
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Assessing Electronic Health Record Readiness at Camp

Dr. Michael Ambrose
Owner & Director
CampDoc.com
Ann Arbor, MI

As the transformation of our world by digital technology continues, and smart phones and tablets guide the way we communicate, it is essential that camps leverage this technology to improve the flow of health information and do everything in their power to reduce unnecessary risk and liability. Given the many opportunities for serious mistakes and costly mishaps when delivering health care each summer, camps are adopting Electronic Health Records (EHRs) now more than ever.

Technology has been successfully used in many industries to improve safety and decrease human error. In the camp setting, Electronic Health Records have the largest impact in three specific areas: collecting and reviewing health information, the administration of medications, and tracking illnesses and injuries.

Paper records can be cumbersome, easily misplaced, and cannot be readily used for any meaningful decision analysis. Electronic Health Records offer complete documentation that is both legible and organized, making a camp clinic more efficient and helping camp health staff avoid mistakes. An EHR can guarantee that all crucial information is obtained and send automatic alerts to those who have missing information. An Electronic Health Record maintains security and privacy, allowing only authorized staff to review individual camper

and staff health forms before the start of camp. Identifying and addressing medical concerns before campers and staff arrive will help ensure a safe, healthy and successful experience for everyone.

Medication errors are the most common type of medical error, and a significant cause of adverse health events in the pediatric population. Using an EHR at camp eliminates the problem of illeg-



ible handwriting and transcription errors. An Electronic Medication Administration Record, or eMAR, can ease and simplify initial camper check-in and ensure safer and faster medication administration throughout the camp season. This technology aids summer camps in documenting when medications are given to campers and staff, and will ensure that they follow the “five rights” of medication administration - right patient, right drug, right dose, right time and right route.

Tracking visits to the camp clinic on paper can also be time

consuming and inefficient. With multiple user access and data entry, an Electronic Health Record can improve the flow of daily clinic call, and most importantly enable meaningful use of the collected illness and injury data. An EHR enables camp health staff to generate rapid reports and analyze medical data so they may eliminate risky situations from day-to-day activities. A camp nurse may analyze illness rates each week, and uncover a gastrointestinal illness starting to spread throughout camp, while a camp director is able to review injury trends after each session, to discover that a waterfront activity at camp is a cause for many sprained ankles, and more dangerous than they initially thought. An Electronic Health Record can aid camp health staff in their efforts to curb illness before it spreads and prevent future injuries from happening.

The less immediate and obvious benefits of Electronic Health Records are just now starting to be seen as EHRs are being used to propel camp medical research efforts. Recent studies have evaluated head lice, food allergies, and disaster and emergency preparedness at camp, and with electronic epidemiologic data collected through Electronic Health Records, camps can now make informed decisions as they work to improve the health and safety each summer.

Adopting an Electronic Health Record at camp is not always an easy decision. Every camp exploring an EHR should review their

(continued on page 13)

goals and needs to help guide decision-making and throughout the implementation process. It is important that every camp assess their readiness to make the change from paper records to an EHR to ensure a successful transition. Are the camp's administrative processes organized, efficient, and well documented? Are clinical workflows efficient, clearly mapped out, and understood by all camp health staff? Are camp health staff comfortable with technology? Change is not always easy, and current processes may actually become less efficient with an EHR. Camp staff should be prepared and expect to change practices they may have had in place at their camp for years, in order to adopt new best practices with an EHR. A designated leadership team and thoughtful implementation plan can help the camp more easily adapt to the new system.

Ensuring the health and safety of all campers and staff while they are away from home is always a top priority. Camps do this by using every tool at their disposal. You have instant access to social media in your pockets and on your wrists, and with Electronic Health Records you have the ability to access up-to-the-minute patient data instantly as well. There is no doubt that EHRs can raise the standard and quality of care delivered at camps. Relying on handwritten instructions is a thing of the past, and easy-to-use, intuitive tools to verify allergies and medications, and to track illnesses and injuries is no longer a luxury, but a necessity to make sure that camps can keep everyone at camp healthy and safe. 🌿



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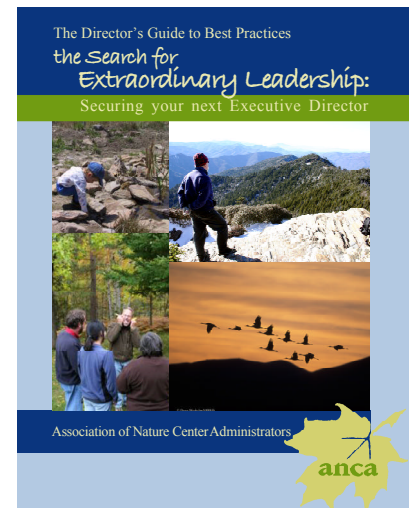
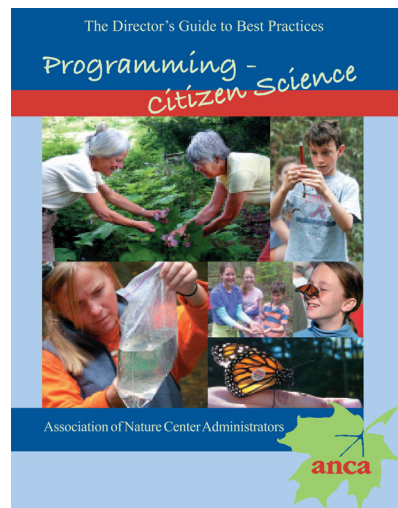


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