

National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes

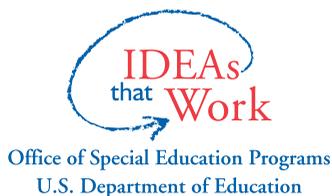
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# Deaf Youth and Summer Programs: The Why and How

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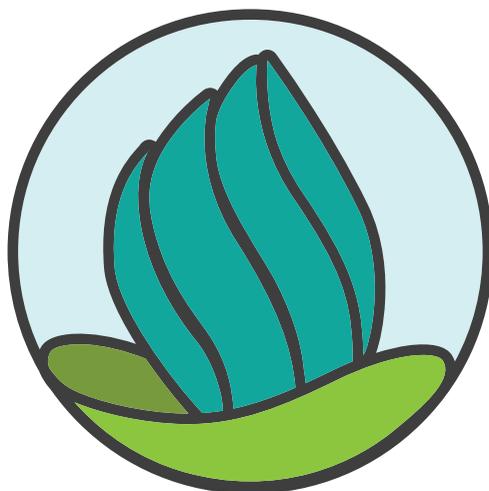


**NDC**  
National Deaf Center  
on Postsecondary Outcomes



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# Deaf Youth and Summer Programs: The Why

## Overview

For many young adults, summer programs such as camp provide a respite from the humdrum of everyday life, a hiatus from the watchful eye of parents and teachers, and the opportunity to try something new and forge long-lasting friendships. At first glance, camp might appear to be all fun and games, but research has demonstrated that camps can have a positive impact on youth development outcomes related to independence, leadership, self-esteem, problem-solving, and feelings of empowerment.<sup>1,2</sup> Summer camp can also provide opportunities to develop personal and professional relationships outside of the constraints of the school environment.<sup>3,4,5,6</sup> This document provides a summary of why summer programs are important for all youth and specifically for deaf youth.



## Why are Summer Programs Important?

Summer programs can contribute to a wide range of outcomes. As a result of attending summer camps and programs, youth are likely to demonstrate growth in three areas: youth development, academic development, and career development.

### YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

- Youth camps have been found to strengthen self-esteem<sup>11</sup> and self-confidence,<sup>1</sup> especially for younger campers and economically disadvantaged youth.<sup>12,13</sup>
- Youth with disabilities benefit from peer role modeling in summer camp environments,<sup>14</sup> which can strengthen an understanding of their capacity.<sup>15</sup>

- Summer camps can support the development of social skills and friendship skills.<sup>1,16,17</sup>
- Camp experience can also contribute to the development of identity, values, and spirituality.<sup>1,17</sup>
- Youth who attend summer camps demonstrate independence,<sup>1,2,15</sup> self-reliance,<sup>2,18</sup> adventure and exploration skills,<sup>1</sup> and leadership skills.<sup>1,19</sup>
- Youth demonstrate stronger environmental stewardship as a result of attending camp.<sup>2</sup>

### EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Summer programs can contribute to increased enrollment in college-track curricula,<sup>20</sup> likelihood that youth will attend college,<sup>21</sup> and motivation to complete college.<sup>9</sup>
- Summer camps and learning programs can contribute to gains in reading achievement<sup>10,22</sup> and reading enjoyment.<sup>23</sup>
- Summer camps and learning programs can also contribute to gains in math achievement.<sup>10,22</sup>
- Youth who attend summer camps may be more likely to attend college, stay in college, and use support services while in college.<sup>22</sup>

### CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- Attitudes about career choices<sup>7,8</sup> and thinking about a field of study<sup>9</sup> can be positively affected through summer programming.
- Programs with an internship component can improve students' career decision-making skills.<sup>10</sup>

## Summer Programs for Deaf Youth

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Summer programs and camps are unique educational opportunities that can play a prominent role in youth development and act as a catalyst for growth and skills development for all students. Deaf youth summer camps are unique in that they bring together deaf students, many of whom are not in regular contact with other deaf students or adults.<sup>24</sup> Research shows that youth with disabilities benefit from attending camps that are disability-specific because such camps reduce feelings of isolation and inadequacy.<sup>11,15</sup> The opportunity to learn from and alongside other similarly disabled individuals can be a powerful experience for youth. The focus of summer programs for deaf youth include, for example, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) content,<sup>25,26,27,28</sup> college and career readiness,<sup>29,30,31</sup> language development,<sup>32</sup> and youth development.<sup>28,33</sup> Many sources of anecdotal evidence, as well as a few research studies, show the positive impact of deaf youth summer camps.

## Why Are Deaf Youth Summer Programs Important?

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- Deaf summer programs can have a positive impact on youth social skills<sup>5</sup> and social acceptance.<sup>34,35</sup>
- Deaf camp environments where youth engage with deaf peers and staff members contribute to a better understanding of Deaf culture and the youth's identity.<sup>5</sup>
- Younger deaf students' interaction with older deaf students at summer programs provides mentorship opportunities and benefits.<sup>3</sup>
- Summer programs can contribute to improvements in language skills for deaf youth.<sup>5</sup>

Summer programs and camps can make a strong contribution to youth, academic, and career development. For deaf youth, summer programs have the additional benefit of reducing isolation, strengthening social skills, and serving as an opportunity to connect with deaf peers and role models. A wide variety of deaf youth **summer camps and programs** exist across the country, though there may not be enough to meet the needs of all deaf youth. Given their potential to make a significant impact on the lives of deaf youth, summer programs are important and should be considered a strategy to support deaf youth as they prepare for life after high school.

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# Deaf Youth and Summer Programs: The How

## Introduction

Summer programs can offer a variety of enrichment activities that encourage students to grow and thrive through meaningful participation. Deaf students who get involved in summer programs can achieve the same benefits as their hearing peers when activities are inclusive and meet the unique needs of deaf students. Summer programs also have significant potential to strengthen student outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Successfully including deaf youth in summer programs requires strategic planning and a focus on the following key considerations in the development or improvement of summer programs.

“Positive youth development outcomes do not occur just because children are at camp. Rather, growth and development occur because of the way that camps are operated in terms of policies, structures, leadership, and activities.”<sup>2</sup>

## Key Considerations

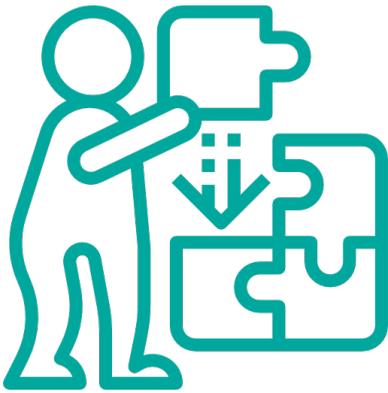
### RECRUITING



Recruiting and enrolling deaf students in summer programs can be challenging. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act protects the privacy of student information and can make it difficult for summer camps to locate deaf students to provide them with information. In addition, students may not feel like they would “fit in” at a deaf camp. To recruit students, consider these strategies:

- Use inclusive language in marketing and outreach.
- Use multiple outreach paths, including presentations at conferences, social media, targeted outreach at schools, and marketing at deaf community events.
- Create promotional videos that show students a snapshot of the program experience.

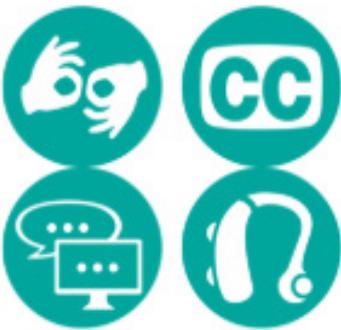
## STRUCTURE



To build new programming, or strengthen existing programming, research suggests that program duration, learning approach, and focus are key factors. Consider these research-based recommendations:

- Offer longer camps with an overnight component, which have greater benefits than shorter camps.<sup>4</sup>
- Encourage students to attend camp more than once, over several years.<sup>4</sup>
- Focus on active, hands-on learning in real-world situations.<sup>5,6</sup>
- Design activities to address specific skill development<sup>7,8,9</sup>

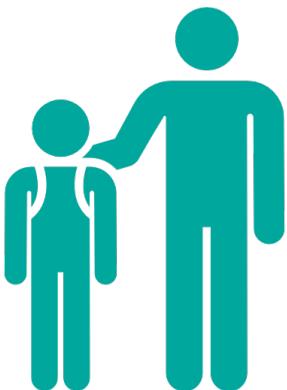
## ACCESS



Deaf students' language needs and communication preferences vary widely and change over time. Quality access in summer programs is critical and challenging. Consider these strategies when planning:

- Collect information about language needs and communication preferences for each student in advance.
- Hire Certified Deaf Interpreters/Deaf Interpreters (CDI/DI) to work with deaf students who have emerging language skills.
- Hire language facilitators who can sign and speak, integrate them within the programming, and make them available to support students' social interactions.
- Caption all media used in instructional settings.

## STAFFING



An experienced staff is an important component of a successful program.<sup>6</sup> Staff members often act as role models to students.<sup>5</sup> Deaf role models have been found to increase young deaf individuals' self-identity and beliefs about their capabilities.<sup>10</sup> In summer programming for deaf youth, staff members who are deaf can model how to navigate professional and educational environments, have successful careers, engage in positive relationships, and advocate for themselves. The following are important staffing considerations:

- Maintain a low student-to-staff ratio.<sup>5</sup>
- Hire staff members with diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Think creatively about how to recruit staff members who are deaf.

## PARTNERSHIPS



Identifying and establishing partnerships across agencies or institutions is key to successful deaf youth programming. Many deaf youth programs have an overnight component, which often requires a relationship with an organization that has residential capacity. Depending on goals and focus, creating a high-quality and sustainable summer program may involve forming relationships with the following:

- Educational institutions
- Local businesses
- Disability organizations
- Vocational rehabilitation
- Other community partners

## MEASUREMENT



Data and measurement are critical to the success of any educational program. Identifying clear goals for data collection allows programs to recognize needed improvements and maximize youth outcomes. Consider these steps for data and measurement planning:

- Identify what you are measuring (e.g., outcomes, behaviors, relationships).
- Use or tailor existing summer program measures (e.g., American Camping Association<sup>11</sup>).
- Decide how to collect data (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups).
- Consider data-collection approaches that would be most accessible for deaf youth and take the least amount of time.

## FUNDING



Finding ways to fund deaf youth activities is a major challenge. Vocational rehabilitation is a source of funding for deaf youth programs in many states, but additional funding sources are often required to ensure sustainable programs. Consider these funding strategies:

- Use Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funds.
- Partner with other state agencies that have funding.
- Apply for grants.
- Seek private foundation funding.

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