

# International Camp Counselor Program creates connections, supports American economy

By Ilir Zherka

As the summer comes to a close, international camp counselors, who shape the experience of so many American campers, will be crossing over land and sea to return to their homes abroad. Not only does their experience infuse American camps with diverse cultures from across the world, a recent study shows it also provides these counselors the opportunity to forge relationships in the U.S. that they carry with them for years to come. These relationships and improved impressions of America help strengthen our national security.

The Department of State's international Camp Counselor program annually brings international counselors to the United States for up to four-months during the summer. The program offers international visitors the chance to temporarily work alongside American colleagues, immerse themselves in American culture, and develop skill sets.

While international camp counselors have a lot to gain by participating in the program, the United States gains the opportunity to advance its public diplomacy goals. A recent study by EurekaFacts, ***Camp Counselor Program 2019 Review Report***, found that the U.S. is increasing mutual understanding with each international camp counselor's return home. According to the report, **84%** of alumni report a more positive opinion about the U.S. and American culture after their experience at American camps. An astounding **98%** of participants made connections with Americans, and over **91%** kept in touch with those American connections after leaving the program. Participants noted that earning money is the least important motivator when deciding to participate in the program.

The U.S., on the other hand, benefits economically from the Camp Counselor program. In 2018, international camp counselors contributed over **\$59 million** to the economy during their 30-day travel period at the conclusion of the program. In these 30 days alone, international camp counselors leave

a big economic footprint, especially in New York, Pennsylvania, and Maine, where they contribute over **\$4 million** in industries related to lodging and entertainment. Additionally, host camps see the program as a major benefit. In fact, **96%** said that exposing American counselors and campers to international culture is a top motivator for participating in the program. Moreover, **99%** of host camps offer equivalent chances regarding job opportunities for Americans in the U.S., as well as equal training and development opportunities.

Host camps also rely on the program for the success of their businesses. **91%** of host camps believe their organization would be negatively impacted if the Camp Counselor program ceased to exist. Additionally, in the absence of international camp counselors, **78%** indicated that their camp services would be reduced, and **50%** reported this would result in the inability to operate during the summer season, leading to a drastic decrease in revenues.

The Department of State's Camp Counselor program creates a network of cross-cultural connections that transcend borders. In addition to being a valuable public diplomacy tool, the program also helps American businesses and strengthens our economy, which is why it enjoys wide support from campers and their families to federal policy makers.

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