Scouting America Special Needs Prepared Camp Program Overview

The Scouting America Special Needs Prepared Camp Program is designed to help parents and leaders of Scouts, and others, who have special needs to easily identify scout camps that have actively prepared to serve these Scouts' needs at camp.

To that end, if your council completes the 11 items below for one or more of your council camps, you will receive a metal Special Needs Prepared Camp sign to display at camp. Perhaps more importantly, your council will be authorized to use the graphic on your electronic and print communications, showing national recognition of your preparations.



The National Camp Accreditation Program (NCAP) defines standards that apply to Scouting America camps. Program Design standard PD-110, "Program Accessibility for Persons With Special Needs" is specific to meeting the special needs of campers. Its interpretation is:

> Specific requirement A ["To the extent practical and safe, Scouts with special needs are included in camp programs. An individual familiar with the conditions and abilities of participants is available to assist."] means that the program of the camp is made available to Scouts with special needs whenever possible. If access is difficult, the camp should evaluate whether the program can be offered to the Scout in a different location or way. The camp should ensure that an individual familiar with the conditions and abilities of a participant with special needs is available to assist when needed. This individual can be a professional caregiver, a family member, or an individual designated by the participant's parent or legal guardian who is familiar with the condition of the participant.

Scouting America, as a "private membership club or organization," generally is not required to comply with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). However, the ADA references certain practices that should influence Scouting America's Special Needs planning. The ADA provides a great amount of detail, including size needs and design considerations that, if followed, will allow many people with special needs to function at camp. You should also check whether there are any state or local laws that have more stringent requirements than those applicable under the ADA and comply with those laws.

1. **Special Needs and Disabilities Including Non-Visible**

   Recognizing that not all special needs or disabilities are visible or immediately apparent is crucial for staff. Non-visible disabilities may include autism, ADHD, learning differences, mental health conditions, medical conditions, mobility issues, and sensory loss including loss of speech, sight, or hearing. Camp staff members, Scouts, and leaders may not be able to see these needs, but they still exist and require understanding and support. Staff should be prepared to use resources like Tranquility Base (a designated quiet/decompression space) and access the Inclusion Toolbox for Special Needs and Disabilities (the Inclusion Toolbox) developed by The National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee which can be found at ablescouts.org/toolbox, as well as community resources from schools and health organizations, to ensure all participants have a positive camp experience.

Additionally, have a plan for service animals at your property approved by your Scout Executive; for more information on service animals see ablescouts.org/toolbox/f.

2. Trail Systems

Preplan by hiking camp trails yourself so that you can ascertain accessibility, level of difficulty and time involved. Provide maps and other visuals to help prepare potential hikers, and have a Q & A page available for your trails. Maintain trails for safety, especially those designated for mobility accessibility. Two resources are:

- Accessible trails in your area: Outdoor Trail Resource for Wheelchairs
- Trail Link app – Your Guide to Trails – provides trail maps finder resource and biking GPS. www.traillink.com/activity/wheelchair-accessible-trails/#info

3. Campsite / Housing

Special Needs campsites should be on a firm, level surface. Ideally the pathways should be connected by level, well maintained pathways to the toilets, showers, roads, dining hall, campfire ring and other program areas. Tenting areas should have plenty of covered space to accommodate mobility and caregiver items. Using beds, rather than cots, provides added stability. Campers should be able to charge their required items near the campsites. ADA toilets/latrines and showers should be easily accessible in the campsite or nearby.

4. Showers and Bathrooms

Accessible showers and bathrooms should be private and large enough to accommodate wheelchair users, with seating in the showers and in the changing areas. Follow local building codes for the number of wheelchair accessible toilet and shower stalls. Both stall types should meet all ADA requirements, and showers should have handheld shower heads and low shelves for personal showering supplies. An ADA restroom should be near any special needs campsite and the changing area of the aquatics section of camps.

5. Program Areas

When preparing camp activities, plan program area capacity and resources based on the expectation that at least 12% of the total camper population may require some sort of accommodation. Use this statistic when planning your range and target activity stations and provide supportive adaptive equipment and/or higher/lower shooting benches. There should also be adaptive equipment in the COPE/climbing and aquatics areas. Check all your program areas for similar accessibility and access the Inclusion Toolbox Section BB at ablescouts.org/toolbox for more detailed information.

6. Buildings Entryways

Entryways can be the biggest barrier to a person with limited mobility, yet they can be one of the easiest issues to address. Eliminate the need to use steps leading into a building; whether it is one step or ten, steps make access more challenging to anyone who uses a cane, walker, or wheelchair. This can be addressed by providing an alternative entrance with a flat threshold or installing a ramp. Handicap-accessible entrance ramps, doors, and handrails should be compliant with all ADA requirements.

7. Main Campfire Areas

Wheelchair users should be able to access the main campfire area either independently or with assistance, such as being driven into the site safely through a main or back entrance. Once inside, there should be a safe and secure place for those with limited mobility to sit and enjoy the campfire. This space needs to be located where the den/patrol or ideally the whole unit can be seated together. Have adequately lit pathways for campfire movement. For those with low hearing/vision, provide a place near the front, again including space for their group. Make sure speakers' faces are visible for those that lipread. Have an area available for those with sensory issues.

8. Health Lodge

Camps must strive for the highest level of accessibility in the health lodge, following best practices for inclusion for everyone. When developing, building, or remodeling, facilitators must prioritize removing barriers to participation. Key considerations include signage for all abilities (including braille and pictures at the proper height), handrails for stairs, ramps, and transfer areas, and accessible call bells with sound and visual emergency alarms. Ensure all areas have ample room for mobility (including caregivers), and that features like exam tables can lower and raise, and the shower/-bathroom is fully accessible.

The Scouting America training sessions for Camp Health Officers (CHO) for Day Camp and Short Term Camps and CHO Training for Long Term Camp provide useful resources for CHOs to ensure compliance with the policy and procedures to be used.

Regarding staff training, recognize that the health lodge should be used for medical needs, not behavioral redirection. Use Tranquility Bases (calming areas) or designated break areas *instead* of sending a camper to the health lodge for self-regulation. This operational approach enables staff to help the camper develop proper coping skills to face challenges. For more detailed guidance, staff should access ablescouts.org/toolbox, section AA.

9. Food Service and Diet

Camps follow the NCAP Standards for Commissary & Food Service: FS-601, 602, and 603.

A licensed dietitian should be on call for consultation regarding special needs diets.

Staff must ensure that emails and phone calls are quickly relayed to the proper food service leads, providing contact information for follow-up with the camper and family. Staff must always check food ingredients for campers who inquire, as providing food that triggers a severe reaction can lead to life-threatening situations.

In the dining area, ensure there is reserved disability seating for wheelchair users. This accessibility can be achieved easily by using blocks under the legs of one or two dining tables to raise them to the required height. Be aware that the dining hall environment can trigger sensory overload due to noise and crowds, so staff should be prepared to direct campers to a designated quiet area where they don't have to be alone.

10. Staff Training

Camp staff training is an integral part of the long-term camp experience following NCAP Standard SQ-402. Having staff aware of possible disabilities that they may encounter can provide an environment

where **all** Scouts have access to a meaningful learning experience. The National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee has developed the Inclusion Toolbox for this very purpose. Each section of the toolbox is meant to be a stand-alone guide to areas commonly found in camp experiences. The published modules are extremely useful for training your staff. The keys to making this work are open lines of communication between parents/guardians and the camp/program director **and** between the camp/program director and those staff members having direct, hands-on contact with Scouts. It is vital to making the program developmentally and physically appropriate for these Scouts. Specific modules for resident camps are in sections AA and BB of the Inclusion Toolbox at: ablescouts.org/toolbox. Adapting programs to fit the needs of Scouts with visible and invisible disabilities has advantages for non-disabled Scouts as well.

Staff Training ideas:

Using Module BB-7, recognize that our long-term camps are often staffed by teenage Scouts, some of whom have limited work experience. The time for staff training prior to camp is limited and is subject to many demands under the NCAP process and state and local laws. At a minimum, these topics should be covered prior to camp:

1. Inclusion of all Scouts, leaders, and guardians
2. Assumption of ability
    a. When accommodations are needed, our mindset should be "how can we make this happen for the individual?"
3. Resources
    a. Individual participant – Ask them what they need to feel comfortable
    b. Parent/guardian/unit leaders – What has worked in similar situations in the past

11. Pre-Camp Staff and Parent's Meeting

A pre-camp staff and parent/Scout meeting should be arranged to set expectations and gather information for both parties before camp begins. This could happen using online options or in person. Make sure the information provided about a camper is disseminated to the relevant staff, especially those who will be working directly with them daily. Remind those receiving this information that they need to respect the privacy of the campers.

Also, as part of pre-camp planning, a staff member should coordinate with the parents, unit or group to arrange for the appropriate caretakers for the campers, if required for a Scout's specific needs.

Do not forget to include all available special needs prepared information in your camp's Leader's Guide so that leaders, families, and the Scouts can better prepare for their camp experience.

Any questions, contact: the Special Needs Chair at Specialneedschair@scouting.org.

APPLY TO LEARN MORE!

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