



# IF YOU DON'T DEBRIEF, IT DIDN'T HAPPEN: THE VALUE OF PARKS & RECREATION

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# Overview

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Reasons for evaluation

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Barriers and solutions

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New approaches

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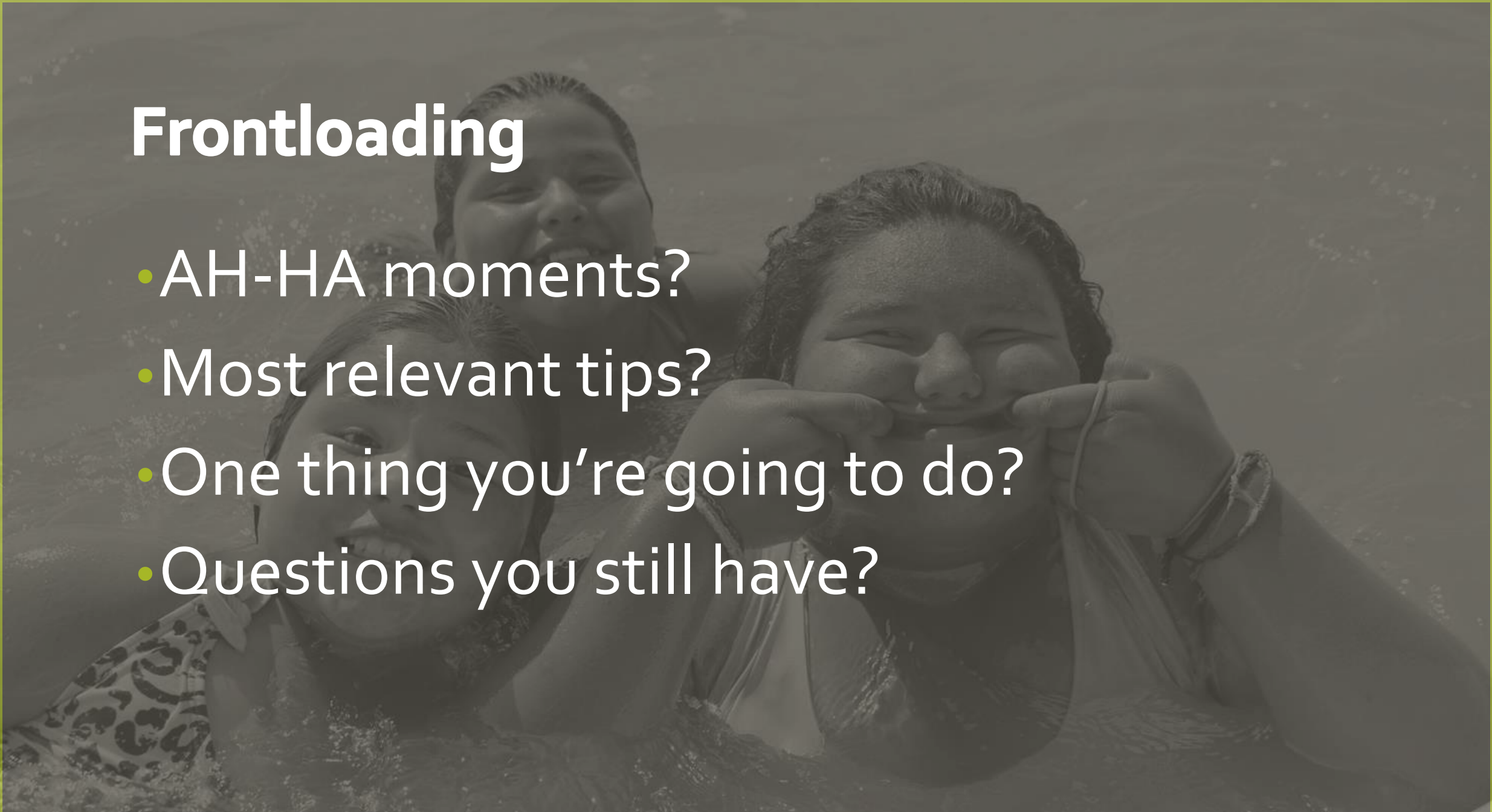
Ideas and resource





# Frontloading

- AH-HA moments?
- Most relevant tips?
- One thing you're going to do?
- Questions you still have?



# WHY EVALUATE?

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Building an evidence base



# Why evaluate?

- Make programs better!!
- Ensure you're achieving your mission and goals
- Credibility
- To tell our story
- Develop systems that support accreditation and organizational performance benchmarks
- Provide evidence to funders



American Camp Association's

# Accreditation Process Guide



2019  
Edition



# Why evaluate?

## Core Standards

"The camp should have a written statement of goals, identify measurable outcomes, train staff to help campers achieve them, and inform parents and campers of these intended outcomes."

## Administration: Program

"AD.31 Camp Experience Evaluation: Camps should have an evaluation system that includes at least three sources of feedback to determine whether the stated goals/outcomes are met and is applied to improve the quality of the camp experience."



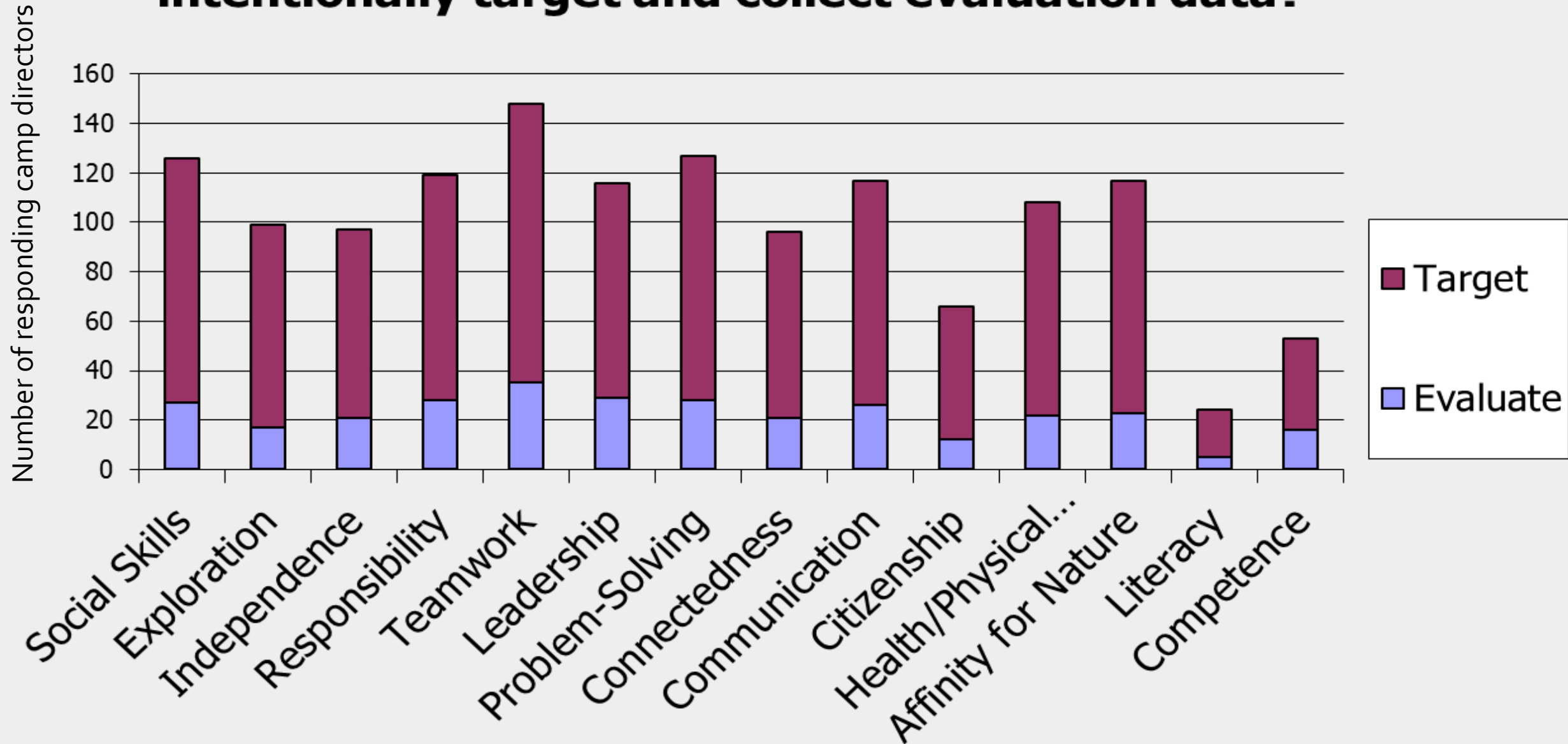
"IF YOU CAN'T MEASURE SOMETHING, YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT. IF YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT, YOU CAN'T CONTROL IT. IF YOU CAN'T CONTROL IT, YOU CAN'T IMPROVE IT."

(DR. H. JAMES HARRINGTON)





# For which development outcomes do you intentionally target and collect evaluation data?





# BARRIERS AND SOLUTIONS

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What tends to work in evaluation?





**BARRIER: Lack of organizational history with evaluation**

1.	Do you have a camp mission statement?
2.	Are camp staff trained to understand your camp's mission <sup>1</sup> statement?
3.	Do you think parents are aware of your camp's mission? Are parents informed of your camp's mission?
4.	Do you have written goals <sup>1</sup> and objectives <sup>1</sup> for your camp?
5.	Are camp staff trained to understand and implement the goals and objectives of your camp?
6.	Are parents informed of your camp's goals and objectives?
7.	As part of camp orientation, do you inform your campers of your camp's mission statement, goals, and objectives?
8.	Is your camp accredited or thinking about meeting the standards of accreditation? Does your camp currently meet the requirements for camp standard PD-6 (Camp Goals and Outcomes), and camp standard PD-7 (Camp Experience Evaluation)?
9.	Have you ever surveyed or interviewed your campers, staff, or parents?
10.	Do you involve others in helping you to evaluate your camp program?

# Gauge Readiness

- **Are you ready to evaluate (This checklist can help.)**
- **Involve staff in conversations about needed data that would help you improve programs/services, better understand stakeholder needs, and so on.**





**BARRIER: NOT SURE WHERE TO START**

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***“The important and difficult job is never to find the right answer, it is to find the right question”***

(Peter Drucker)



# Begin With Good Questions

## Program questions

- What are my top 3 programs, which programs underperform, & which programs are struggling?
- What trends can we identify in our programs and services?

## Youth questions

- How do we make youth better? Are there times when we make them worse?
- When we impact camper growth and development, how long do those impacts last?

## Staff questions

- How can I better prepare my staff for their roles and responsibilities?
- What staff characteristics are most related to positive outcomes in campers?

## Parent questions

- Of the things we do, what do parents care about most?
- What are parents' "pain points"?
- Are our approaches aligned w/parents' needs?



# **BARRIER: LACK OF EVALUATION EXPERTISE**

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# Collaborate/Co-Op

College and university faculty and students can serve as resources collaborators, or consultants

Online communities

Collaboration elements: equal partners, sensitive to organization needs/history, openness, ability to leverage strengths to overcome weaknesses, clear communication.



**BARRIER:  
EVALUATION  
HASN'T BEEN  
A PRIORITY  
IN THE PAST**

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# Resource Your Evaluation Efforts

- Organizations **fund what they value**, and they **value what they fund**
- Treat evaluation like a “program area” that receives appropriate resources and staff attention
- Identify your needs well in advance; Begin with the end in mind





**BARRIER: WE OFFER LOTS OF ACTIVITIES AND TARGET  
MANY OUTCOMES; EVALUATION WILL BE A NIGHTMARE**



# Focus on a Small Set of Outcomes

- Don't try to target too many outcomes. Don't collect data you're not going to use.
- Consider your mission as a starting point. What outcomes are most central to your mission? (For example...is satisfaction part of your mission?)
- As you think about outcomes, consider the relationship between what staff do and the result for youth participants (i.e., "If staff do this, then campers will....")





# Establish Benchmarks

- Identify benchmarks as you create your evaluation plan (for your org's evaluation process; for your targeted outcomes)
- High-quality orgs benchmark their programs with comparable (often exemplary) peers
- Create a common jargon and shared understanding of what you want to accomplish. Staff benefit from goals and tangible metrics



A photograph of a group of people at a swimming pool, overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter. In the foreground, a woman sits on a folding chair on the pool deck. Behind her, several other people are standing or kneeling near the pool's edge, some with their hands raised in a celebratory gesture. The pool's tiled edge and a depth marker reading "6 FT" are visible. A chain-link fence is in the background.

# **BARRIER: UNSURE ABOUT WHAT TYPES OF DATA WE SHOULD COLLECT**



# Numbers and Words

- Data collection begins with good evaluation questions (see previous point about where to start)
- Using numeric scales (quantitative data) as well as open-ended questions or oral responses (qualitative data) can help you answer different questions
- Consider your capacity to collect and analyze the data, and then collect what you can manage.





**BARRIER:**  
**OUR EVAL FORM WAS CREATED YEARS AGO, BUT WE**  
**DON'T KNOW HOW TO IMPROVE IT**

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# Use Existing Measures



**Use**

Use existing, previously tested and validated measures, scales, instruments (avoid “redoing the wheel”)

**Be**

Be careful with customization

**Do**

If you choose to design your own, do it right.



+ New chat

Cooperation Skills Survey.

Camp Cooperation Assessment

Leadership Assessment Survey

Youth Program Evaluation Thre

New chat

Bootstrapping Explained

Annual Summer Camp Marketi

Clear conversations

Upgrade to Plus

NEW

Dark mode

Updates & FAQ

Log out

# ChatGPT



## Examples

"Explain quantum computing in simple terms" →

"Got any creative ideas for a 10 year old's birthday?" →

"How do I make an HTTP request in Javascript?" →



## Capabilities

Remembers what user said earlier in the conversation

Allows user to provide follow-up corrections

Trained to decline inappropriate requests



## Limitations

May occasionally generate incorrect information

May occasionally produce harmful instructions or biased content

Limited knowledge of world and events after 2021

Please design 3 survey questions that assess the development of cooperation skills at a residential summer camp serving early adolescents.





**BARRIER: EVALUATION TAKES TOO MUCH TIME**

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# Focus, Pilot, Simplify

Evaluation does take time, but it shouldn't overly burden the people you're collecting data from

Test your measures with small "pilot" groups. Have staff review your measures, as well as individuals outside your organization (look for errors, omissions, confusing or extraneous questions)

Remove questions that aren't central to your evaluation effort (remember the importance of "good questions"). Shorten your measures and methods as much as possible.



**BARRIER:  
STAKEHOLDERS  
(YOUTH, PARENTS,  
STAFF) DON'T SEEM  
TO CARE ABOUT  
EVALUATION**





## Secure Staff Buy-In

- Staff must have buy-in; they are key to the success of any evaluation effort
- Clearly identify roles and responsibilities
- Assign a staff who can be a “champion” of the evaluation process
- Give staff recognition for their contributions to the process



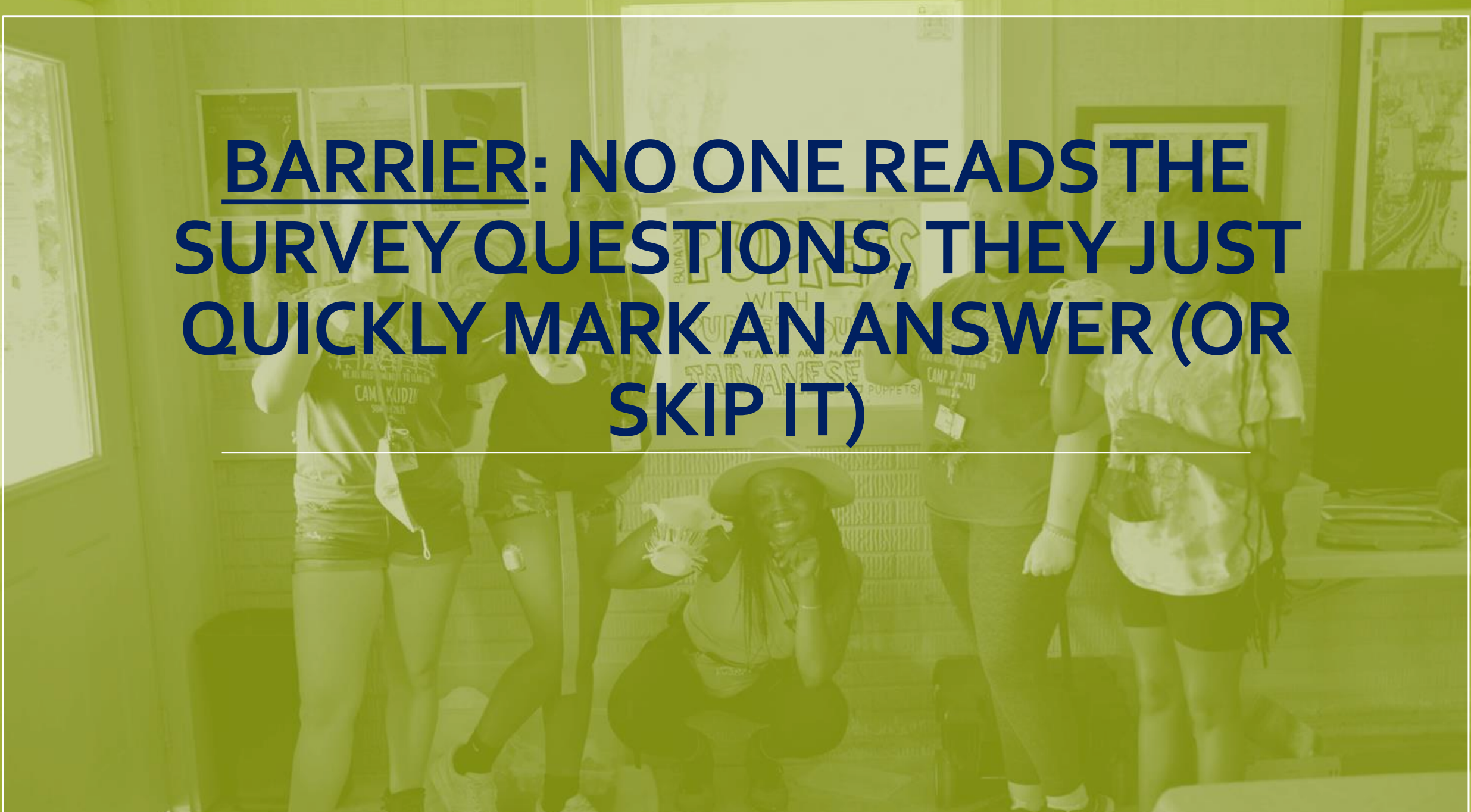
## Engage Your Stakeholders

- Tell stakeholders why their input is important, and how they can get involved in the evaluation process. Help them understand how critical they are to the ongoing quality of the camp experience.
- Don't rely on only one method of communication for engaging stakeholders in camp evaluation processes...some systems may fail, some are more effective than others
- Market your evaluation efforts intentionally (like a separate program)



**BARRIER: NO ONE READS THE  
SURVEY QUESTIONS, THEY JUST  
QUICKLY MARK AN ANSWER (OR  
SKIP IT)**

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# Ask Better Questions

Tell them why it matters! How will y'all be better because of their feedback?

Assign staff to closely monitor on-site survey processes

Provide incentives to encourage quality completion

If you use online surveys, must ensure a fail-safe way to collect email addresses.

Have follow-up processes to give people a 2<sup>nd</sup> opportunity to respond.



# Pay Attention to How your Evaluation is Implemented

- A focus on quality and intentionality requires commitment
- Don't let great get in the way of good
- Administration must support program design and data collection procedures
- It is critical that an evaluation plan be implemented by staff as designed (i.e., fidelity)
- All the work you do to target outcomes won't matter if the quality of the data is poor or if your response rate is low

What is your child's gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-Binary

## Prepare for the Unexpected

- Asking questions of your stakeholders may provoke new and unplanned reactions
- Some communications may be directed to Spam, Junk, or “Clutter” folders
- Surveys might not be printed correctly
- Procedures might be forgotten or overlooked





**BARRIER: LIMITED  
EXPERIENCE WITH  
DATA COLLECTION  
AND ANALYSIS**



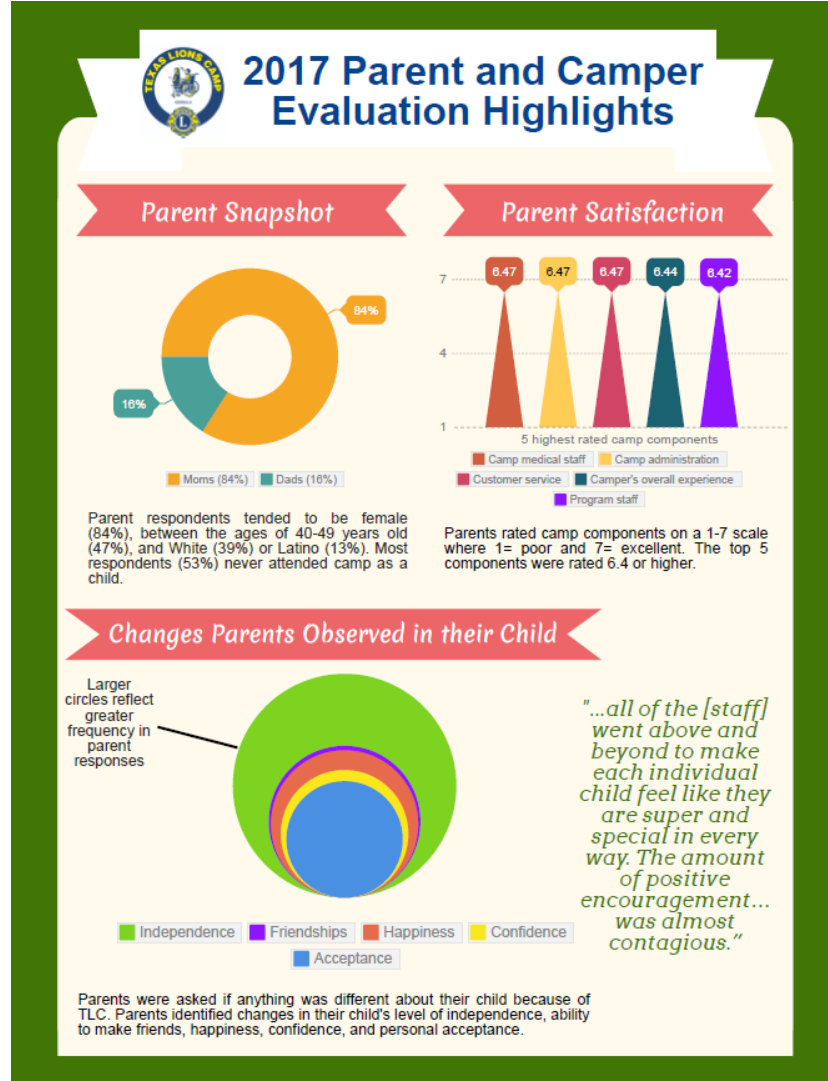
## Engage a Collaborator or Consultant

- Use your collaborator or consultant to help you use the best approach for data analysis given your questions, your method, and the quality of your data.
- Web-based tools designed to produce simple results can help



**BARRIER: Not  
sure how to report  
findings in a  
meaningful way**





# Visualize

- Graphically represent your results
- Integrate findings with other organizational info: context, history, activities, performance
- Highlight key findings to diverse stakeholders
- Train yourself: YouTube, Google





**BARRIER: WE TRIED EVALUATION LAST  
YEAR, AND IT WASN'T SUCCESSFUL**

# Embrace the Opportunity to Improve Your Organization's Evaluation Processes

## Consider

- Consider questions you wish you had asked (Gee I wish I...)

## Assess

- Assess how was it implemented (Did staff have buy-in? Was the evaluation implemented with fidelity?)

## Celebrate

- Celebrate negative and null results (they NEED to be talked about!!)

## Improve

- Improve your evaluation process and methods for next time





## What's your plan?

- AH-HA moments?
- Most relevant tips?
- One thing you're going to do?
- Questions you still have?

# IF YOU DON'T DEBRIEF, IT DIDN'T HAPPEN

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