



# **Guide to Reviewing the Continuous Camp Improvement Program**

**National Camp Accreditation Program  
National Council, Boy Scouts of America**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Continuous Camp Improvement Program (CCIP) is one of the three pillars of the National Camp Accreditation Program (NCAP). The CCIP provides a proven method for councils to improve their camp properties and camps, elevating their performance, and providing a safer, higher quality and more exciting camping experience for their youth. As an authorization reviewer, you play a critical role in helping councils obtain the maximum benefit from the CCIP. This guide will provide you instructions and assistance in how to work with councils in reviewing their camp strategic improvement plan, their annual camp improvement program, and coaching them on how to get the most out of it. This guide will also provide direction on how to handle a council that has a weak CCIP.

A companion to this guide is the *Guide to the Continuous Camp Improvement Program*, which is made available to councils and camps to assist them in implementing the CCIP. You should be familiar with both this guide, as it provides the framework within which councils work, and BSA National Camp Standard AO-810, which establishes the minimum expectations for CCIP in the council and camps.

## 1. STANDARD AO-810 – THE MINIMUM EXPECTATIONS

National Camp Standard AO-810 provides:

### **STANDARD:**

**The camp participates in the BSA Continuous Camp Improvement Program that addresses improvements in:**

- Staff
- Program
- Program equipment
- Facilities
- Sustainability
- Marketing and communication
- Attendees and participation

### **Specific Requirements of the Standard:**

- A. The council has performed an analysis to identify its stakeholders and involved them in gathering information on areas of possible improvement and areas of strength.
- B. Effective January 1, 2019, the camp has a camp strategic improvement plan that identifies one or more areas of improvement and one or more areas of strength that the council will address over the next four to seven years, which collectively address at least five of the continuous camp improvement categories. For each identified area, the plan sets forth improvement measures, an approximate time for initiation and completion, and how the camp will determine the success of its measures.
- C. Each year, the council will develop an annual camp improvement plan that identifies one or more areas of improvement and one or more areas of strength that the camp will address during the year, which collectively address at least four of the continuous camp improvement categories. Some of these measures may be based on the camp strategic improvement plan and some should be based on postcamp/

precamp inspections, camp staff reports, customer satisfaction surveys, or other feedback. For each area identified, the council determines a goal, a quantitative metric, and success criteria.

- D. Annually, the council collects data that indicates progress on the measures, and at the start of the following season includes in the Declaration of Readiness a report on the goals, their success criteria, and whether the goals were achieved.

Specific Requirement A seeks to ensure that councils engage their volunteers, customers and other stakeholders, including when appropriate youth, in developing information about the strengths (areas of strength) and weaknesses (areas of improvement) are at the camp and how to address them.

Specific Requirement B requires that councils develop a *camp strategic improvement plan* for each camp that takes a longer-term view, over four to seven years, about how the council will improve that camp. The details of camp strategic improvement plan are discussed below.

Specific Requirement C requires that councils develop and implement an annual camp improvement program that takes elements from the camp strategic improvement plan, pre-camp and post-camp inspections, customer feedback and staff feedback and tries to make improvements during the specific camping season.

Specific Requirement D requires that councils track their progress and report it annually in the Declaration of Readiness.

With this overview, we are ready to move to evaluating the council's CCIP program as it relates to its camps.

## 2. SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF THE CCIP

All camps must participate in the CCIP. Councils have some discretion on how their CCIP. It is important that authorization reviewers give councils appropriate freedom to structure their programs, while ensuring that meaningful improvement results.

### 2.1 Minimum Requirements

Each camp must have both a *camp strategic improvement plan* and an *annual camp improvement program*.

The *camp strategic improvement plan* must achieve meaningful improvement over the term of the authorization.

The *annual camp improvement program* must support the *camp strategic improvement plan* and the collection of annual improvement programs must have assisted the camp strategic improvement plan in achieving meaningful improvement over the term of the authorization.

Meaningful improvement is defined with more particularity in the *Guide to the Continuous Camp Improvement Program* and in Section 5 of this Guide, but it means that the camp is objectively in a better place at the end of the authorization period than it was at the beginning of the authorization period. Authorization reviewers may consider catastrophic events (fires, landslides, floods, government closures) in evaluating whether meaningful improvement is achieved.

Councils are not required to have a camp strategic improvement plan for camp properties that do not host a camp but should be encouraged to develop one that addresses at least facilities and sustainability.

## 2.2 Council Flexibilities

Councils may exercise at least the following flexibilities in complying with Standard AO-810 during the annual assessment process and during authorization review:

- Councils may choose to write a single camp strategic improvement plan for a *camp property* and all or some of the *camps* conducted on that *camp property*;
- Councils may choose to write a single camp strategic improvement plan for all or a group of camps;
- Councils are encouraged to write a single camp strategic improvement plan for the group of all similar day camps and the group of all similar family camps. Similar camps are those that share a program, even if location or staffing may be different (e.g., day camp in a box or similar); and
- Councils may write a single annual improvement plan/program for the group of all similar day camps and/or the group of all similar family camps, although councils may have each day camp or family camp also adopt a few measures specific to that camp, which is encouraged.

The bottom line is that the council may structure the program as it sees fit so long as each camp is addressed.

## 3. REVIEWING THE CAMP STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Standard AO-810, Specific Requirement B provides:

Effective January 1, 2019, the camp has a camp strategic improvement plan that identifies one or more areas of improvement and one or more areas of strength that the council will address over the next four to seven years, which collectively address at least five of the continuous camp improvement categories. For each identified area, the plan sets forth improvement measures, an approximate time for initiation and completion, and how the camp will determine the success of its measures.

The continuous camp improvement categories are as follows:

- Staff
- Program
- Program equipment
- Facilities
- Sustainability
- Marketing and communication
- Attendees and participation

Councils have considerable latitude in how they structure the *camp strategic improvement plan*. First, NCAP has determined that councils may “group” all of their day camps or family camps

that follow a common program template, such as a “day camp in a box” or “family camp in a box” where the same program is offered at various locations, with or without a common staff. If multiple templates are used, then it is likely each template would need a separate plan.

Allowable options include:

- Creating a separate plan for each camp and camp property;
- Creating a plan for each camp property and addressing each camp on that property as part of a single plan;
- Creating a single council wide plan for all camps; or
- Any combination of the above.

**Step 1. Check that all camp properties and camps are covered.** The first step is to ensure that it addresses each camp and camp property. Double check plans against the list of camp properties and camps you prepared in Section A.1 and A.2 of the draft Authorization to Operate. If any camps are missing, contact the council to request the appropriate plans. If camps appear in the plans that are not listed in Section A.1 or A.2, contact the council and, if appropriate, add to Section A.1 or A.2 as appropriate.

**Step 2: Ensure that the minimum Standard AO-810 requirements are met for each camp property and camp.** Standard AO-810 requires that the camp strategic improvement plan contain the following elements:

- The plan must cover a period of four to seven years and reach at least to the next application year.
- The plan must show improvement measures in at least five of the continuous camp improvement categories for each camp (or, in the case of day camps and family camps, five for the group of day camps or family camps).
- The proposed improvement measures must state whether they address an area of strength or an area of improvement. At least one measure must address an area of strength and one area address an area of improvement. The expectation is that more improvement measures will be aimed at areas of improvement.
- Each improvement measure must include an approximate time for initiation and completion and how the camp will determine the success of its measures.
- The measures should be spread reasonably over the plan period. For example, no more than a third of the measures should fall in a single year and they should not be clustered in the last two years of the plan period. This suggests an intent to circumvent the requirement for *continuous* improvement.

**Step 3: Substantive review.** Substantive review is the heart of the authorization process and where the authorization reviewer must exercise judgement, discretion and persuasion in ensuring that the camp strategic improvement plan will result in meaningful improvement over time. A few principles to help guide the reviewer:

- **Four to seven years.** It is recommended that councils conform the four to seven year period to either the authorization review cycle or their council strategic planning cycle. NCAP prefers the council strategic planning cycle, as that better aligns camping with the overall council program. The allowance for four to seven years should allow councils to use an appropriate planning period. If a council wants to use another period, the region

camp accreditation chair has authority to authorize that other period upon appropriate justification that the alternative period will better achieve NCAP objectives.

- **Improving a camp.** A council may improve a camp in four ways and the authorization reviewer should be prepared to probe the council's mix of those four ways. The four ways are:
  - ***Build on areas of strength.*** If a camp already does something well, and it can be further improved, then that will improve the camp and its competitiveness as word of the camp's excellence in the area spreads.
  - ***Maintain an area of strength.*** If a camp is already doing something as well as it can and no further improvements are reasonably available due to cost, staffing or other limitations, then the council may choose to maintain existing levels of excellence. One of the challenges presented by NCAP is that it does not help to build up areas if the other areas slide in their performance.
  - ***Enhance an area of improvement (weakness).*** A camp's overall competitiveness can be improved by finding and improving weaker areas. These weaker areas detract from the camp's desirability and competitiveness and news will spread about those weaker areas.
  - ***Eliminate areas of weakness.*** A camp may also improve an area of weakness by choosing to eliminate it. For example, if you have two camps in close proximity, one has a large lake and one a small pond, it makes no sense for the camp on the small pond to offer motorboating, sailing or personal watercraft because it will never be able to compete with the camp on the larger lake if it offers those same programs just do to the different geographic setting.
- **Balancing.** Standard AO-810 requires, and councils should be encouraged, to balance their camp strategic improvement plans and annual camp improvement programs among the four approaches set forth above. A balanced approach preserves and grows the camp's strengths while gradually improving underperforming areas, either by enhancing them or eliminating them. The result is that the camp's overall competitive position will improve relative to its earlier performance. That is NCAP's goal – to elevate camp performance over time.
- **Discourage grandiose expenditures.** NCAP's goals can usually be achieved without grandiose expenditure. Most families coming to a Scout camp or sending their youth to the Scout camp do not expect resort quality accommodations. However, they do expect that the facilities, program equipment and program areas will be safe, clean, well-organized and well-maintained. That means that they should be free of filth, poorly maintained equipment or evidence of decay. This goal can be achieved by encouraging councils to schedule work days before camp to clean, repair, repaint, clean, organize and clean the camp. Staff could be brought in a day earlier to give more time for these activities, at less cost than building a new "class A" quality facility and with the benefits flowing across the camp more broadly.
- **Encourage councils to focus on bigger impact areas first.** NCAP's reviews and interviews of campers and participants show that staff quality and enthusiasm is the biggest factor in a successful summer. Steps that a council and/or camp takes to build staff quality and staff enthusiasm are an important start. Behind staff comes program quality, which includes both the program itself, but also its program equipment. A program with inadequate equipment where youth must wait to get their hands on the activity will fare more poorly than one that has adequate quantities of program

equipment. Similarly, poorly maintained program equipment, such as bent arrows, splintered oars or paddles, makes the activity less fun and less successful.

Authorization reviewers should encourage councils to look at the quality of programs and program equipment as a critical part of the CCIP.

- **Sustainability.** Sustainability also comes in two parts: raising revenues or cutting costs. Both contribute to the bottom line.
  - **Raising revenues.** If a council is operating a camp that is considerably below surrounding camps in fees, the council could be encouraged to consider a judicious increase to provide more money for program equipment and facilities and a higher boost to the council's year round program. If certain activities are very costly, but popular, the council could look at assessing fees for those programs to help shift the costs to those who desire the program and improve program return.
  - **Cutting costs.** There are many possible costs in a camp and a council has broad discretion to reduce them. In many camps, utility costs could be reduced by fixing leaks, replacing inefficient lighting and appliances, regulating hot water usage, and taking similar steps.
- **Planning and tracking programs.** A council and camp can only be as efficient as the data that support it. An excellent part of a camp strategic improvement plan for a camp without one would be a maintenance planning and tracking program, such as those supported by Outdoor Programs. These programs enable councils to identify issues that are costing them money and devote resources to fixing them permanently, often at great overall savings and improvements in facilities and program.
- **How much improvement should NCAP seek?** NCAP seeks meaningful improvement in camps, but not at any cost. NCAP encourages councils to engage in high quality strategic planning that achieves necessary improvements over a time frame that the council can raise the required funds or fund them from camp revenues. NCAP does not seek improvements in facilities alone and has provided some specific guidelines. As stated in the *Guide to the Authorization to Operate*, goals for facility improvements over the term of an Authorization to Operate are quite modest:

*Guidelines for consideration*

- *Camps with a CFET score > 4.0.* For these camps, NCAP seeks a commitment to maintain camps in this range at or above the current level.
- *Camps with a CFET score > 3.0 but less than 4.0.* NCAP seeks a commitment to improve camps in this range of 0.1 point over the authorization period.
- *Camps with a CFET score > 2.0 but less than 3.0.* NCAP seeks a commitment to improve camps in this range by 0.3 point over the authorization period.
- *Camps with a CFET score < 2.0.* NCAP seeks a commitment to improve camps in this range by at least 0.5 points over the authorization period or else removal of offending structures.

Councils may commit to more, but authorization reviewers should discourage excessive expenditure, particularly if the council is in financial stress (e.g., council overall budget is in the red). Authorization reviewers may exercise discretion in approving less aggressive camp strategic improvement plans where council finances are weak, but the bottom line is that some improvement must be shown in all camps over the authorization

period and if the council's finances are stressed and the council has multiple properties, the council should be challenged whether it needs to keep all of the properties or if some should be sold or mothballed to provide resources to improve the others and the bottom line support for the council's program.

- **Financial improvement.** NCAP does seek financial improvements in camp programs so that they provide support for necessary program equipment and facilities maintenance and enhancement over time. In general, NCAP would hope to see the council's camp strategic improvement plan moving the camp (and camp properties) toward a goal of returning 5% over expenses to the council budget each year and a 5% return on the invested asset base, which would provide a good foundation for replacing and enhancing program equipment and facilities over time.

#### 4. REVIEWING THE ANNUAL CAMP IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Authorization reviewers also need to review the council's past annual camp improvement programs for each of the camps. The purpose of this retrospective review is to assess whether the council is achieving meaningful improvements through the annual improvement program. If it looks as if the council has had its camp select meaningful goals and a reasonable number of those goals have been achieved resulting in a better program at the end of the authorization period compared to the beginning of the authorization period, then the authorization reviewer has a council that is using the program appropriately and no further action is needed except for the standard condition in the template Authorization to Operate. If a council has camps that are not selecting meaningful goals and is not achieving meaningful improvements over the course of the Authorization to Operate period, then the authorization reviewer should consult with the region camp accreditation chair about whether a plan of improvement should be required and incorporated in to the specific terms and conditions of the Authorization to Operate.

#### 5. DECISION CRITERIA AND ESCALATION

As stated above, the goal of NCAP is to achieve meaningful improvement. The meaning of "meaningful improvement" is discussed in Part 3 of the *Guide to the Continuous Camp Improvement Program* and the authorization reviewer should consult that Guide in reaching conclusions.

If the authorization reviewer, based on review of the camp strategic improvement plan, finds that there is a reasonable likelihood that it will lead to meaningful improvement, the camp strategic improvement plan should be approved and attached to the Authorization to Operate. If the authorization reviewer is not fully persuaded, but the council and camp has demonstrated improvement over the prior authorization period and has a good record with the annual camp improvement program, the reviewer may approve the camp strategic improvement plan on the strength of that past performance.

If the authorization reviewer does not believe that the camp strategic improvement plan, even when considering prior improvements, meets the goal of achieving meaningful camp improvement as outlined in Part 3 of the *Guide to the Continuous Camp Improvement Program*, then the reviewer should take the following steps:



**Step 1.** Discuss concerns with council representative, counsel them on NCAP goals and objectives and encourage the council to reconsider and submit new camp strategic improvement plans that better achieve NCAP goals and objectives. Authorization reviewers have discretion to return goals to councils for further work. If the first referral back to the council still does not result in acceptable results, then proceed to Step 2.

**Step 2.** Notify and discuss concerns with the region camp accreditation chair. This will provide notice to the region and an opportunity to vet concerns before proceeding further.

**Step 3.** If the region camp accreditation chair agrees, then the authorization reviewer should contact the area director and area camp assessment chair and develop a plan for meeting with the council to persuade it to work harder on the CCIP. Often a face-to-face meeting or telephone conference with key council decisionmakers with the area director and area leadership participating can help resolve issues. If, after step 3, the council submits a reasonable plan, it should be approved and included in the Authorization to Operate. If the council still is reluctant to take the necessary steps for camp improvement, then proceed to step 4.

**Step 4.** In step 4, the authorization reviewer, in conjunction with the area director, the regional NCAP staff advisor, and designated members of the area or regional leadership team will craft requirements for a Plan of Improvement for continuous camp improvement and will place the proposed specific terms and conditions in the Authorization to Operate after consulting with and receiving the approval of the region camp accreditation chair and region director.

## 6. AUTHORIZATION TO OPERATE

In most cases, where a council has submitted an appropriate camp strategic improvement plan and the camps have adequately participated in the annual camp improvement program, the authorization reviewer will use standard template language and attach the approved camp strategic improvement plans to the Authorization to Operate.

If the council does not submit an approvable camp strategic improvement plan or has not participated adequately in the annual camp improvement program, the authorization reviewer should work with region and area leadership to persuade the council to take the necessary steps. Only if such informal measures are unsatisfactory should the authorization reviewer proceed through the four step process leading to specific terms and conditions or, in severe cases, seek approval for either a conditional authorization or denial of authorization. Authorization reviewers working with difficult councils are requested to communicate closely with the region camp accreditation chair so that informal resources can be brought to bear to make the NCAP process non-contentious and beneficial. Formal corrective action measures are not the preferred path, when avoidable.

## 7. AMENDMENT OF CAMP STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENT PLANS

Councils are free to amend their camp strategic improvement plans at any time and must, as part of the interim report, indicate whether they are proceeding with the existing approved plan or seeking a change.

## 7.1 Review and Approval of Changes to Camp Strategic Improvement Plans

If NCAP receives a request for amendment, either at [NCAP@scouting.org](mailto:NCAP@scouting.org) or by a member of the regional camp authorization team receiving a request, the request should be copied to National (by submitting to [NCAP@scouting.org](mailto:NCAP@scouting.org)) and then routed to the region camp accreditation chair for assignment. In general, if the authorization reviewer who wrote the authorization report is still available, the authorization reviewer will review the proposed amended plan. If the prior reviewer is not available, then the peer reviewer or a new reviewer should be appointed.

The reviewer will look at the council's proposed amendment to the plan, the council's proposed justification for the change, and make a decision whether to approve the amended plan or not.

- Addition of new elements. If a council seeks to add a new element, so long as it appears reasonably likely to improve camp safety or program quality, it should be approved.
- Removal of existing elements. In general, councils are free to revise or remove existing camp strategic improvement plan elements so long as the amended plan will still achieve a meaningful improvement at the camp. Often councils will need to postpone plan elements due to fundraising shortfalls or similar problems. These requests are usually approvable as long as the remaining elements of the camp strategic improvement plan will achieve a meaningful improvement over the life of the authorization or if the revised date will still allow meaningful improvement within the authorization period.

If the reviewer finds that the amended plan is approvable, it should be attached to the authorization to operate, a copy of the new plan submitted to [NCAP@scouting.org](mailto:NCAP@scouting.org) with a note that the amended plan is approved, and then a copy returned to the council with an approval letter with directions to the council to attach the new plan and approval letter to the Authorization to Operate.

If the reviewer finds that the amended plan is not approvable, a letter of concern should be sent to the council outlining the concerns and what the council could do to address those concerns. The existing plan should be retained. The council may still undertake its proposed plan of action and use any resulting improvements in justifying that it has achieved a meaningful improvement, but its progress will be judged against the approved plan. If, at the end of the authorization period, the council achieves a meaningful improvement despite the variance from the approved plan, it has still successfully completed the CCIP and is in compliance with BSA National Camp Standard AO-810.

## 8. ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

Authorization reviewers needing additional guidance should consult with the region camp accreditation chair or region staff advisor. In appropriate situations, they may recommend contact with national representatives to assist with answers to questions.