

...PREPARE STAFF (22)

VITALLY IMPORTANT

Experiential Education (EE) programs succeed or struggle based largely on their ability to hire, train, supervise, and retain competent **field** and **administrative** staff. While this “How To” page is devoted to both types of staff, supplementary information addresses the principal differences between the two. Once upon a time, field staff were chosen and prepared solely for their technical activity, safety, and environmental (hard) skills. Today, the soft skills of organizing, instructing, and especially facilitating are more important, because the tangible hard skills are more easily trained in field staff. However, the soft skills enable staff to deliver complex recreational, educational, developmental, and therapeutic programs with competence.

COMPETENCE

Competence is the combined application of skill, attitude, knowledge, behavior, confidence, experience, and values so as to efficiently and effectively achieve the desired outcomes and program purpose. Hiring, training, supervising, and retaining staff revolves around competence and a **list of such competencies** can be found in supplementary materials within the reading list.

HIRING

Experienced administrative staff members hire potential field staff who are diverse, tech savvy, passionate about the outdoors, realistic about low wages, idealistic about changing the world (socially and environmentally), and preferably representative of their program clientele. Field staff will expect to be included in administrative decision-making and need to be supported by and contribute to a purposeful community.

TRAINING

Training is often provided in inverse proportion to experience. More experienced staff require less initial training, while less experienced staff require more training. This is based on the unproven common belief that extensive and intensive experience brings improved judgment.

Nevertheless, the bulk of initial staff training: is conducted in the period before the program season commences, follows a constructivist approach by building on existing competence, and utilizes a parallel process that instructs experientially in the very way staff are expected to work with their clients. As much as possible, training occurs in operational settings that staff normally work within, while didactic content may be delivered in traditional classroom-like settings. Effective training presents real world scenarios or simulations that may actually be encountered and uses experienced staff as models, trainers, and mentors in this process.

SUPERVISING

Once trained, EE staff are well supervised by administrators who continue to support staff to grow and expand their competence. Common supervisory practices: engage staff in developing their own advancement goals with periodic self-assessments, offer in-service training workshops that evaluate competence, fund professional conference attendance and hard activity skill re-certification, shower staff with mentored opportunities and give feedback from supervisors, peers, and/or clients, while documenting records of this new learning and showing monitored progress toward their goals.

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