
Recreation Workers

Significant Points

- The recreation field offers an unusually large number of part-time and seasonal job opportunities.
- Opportunities for part-time, seasonal, and temporary recreation jobs will be good, but competition will remain keen for full-time career positions.
- Many recreation workers spend most of their time outdoors and may work in a variety of weather conditions.

Nature of the Work

As participation in organized recreational activities grows, *recreation workers* will be needed to plan, organize, and direct these activities in local playgrounds and recreation areas, parks, community and senior centers, nursing homes and other senior housing, camps, and tourist attractions. These workers lead groups in activities such as arts and crafts, sports, performing arts, camping, and other special interests. They make sure that participants abide by the rules of the camps and recreational facilities and that safety practices are adhered to so that no one gets injured. Recreation workers also are found in some businesses or business groups, where they direct leisure activities for employees, such as softball or bowling, and organize sports leagues.

Recreation workers hold a variety of positions at different levels of responsibility. Those who work directly with children in residential or day camps are called *camp counselors*. These workers lead and instruct children and teenagers in a variety of outdoor recreation activities, such as swimming, hiking, horseback riding, and camping. In addition, counselors who specialize may teach campers special subjects, such as archery, boating, music, drama, gymnastics, tennis, and computers. In residential camps, counselors also provide guidance and supervise daily living and socialization. *Camp directors* typically supervise camp counselors, plan camp activities or programs, and perform the various administrative functions of a camp.

Workers who provide instruction and coaching primarily in one activity, such as art, music, drama, swimming, or tennis, are called *activity specialists*. These workers can work in camps or anywhere else where there is interest in a single activity.

Recreation leaders are responsible for a recreation program's daily operation. They primarily organize and direct participants, schedule the use of facilities, keep records of equipment use, and ensure that recreation facilities and equipment are used properly. In addition, they may lead classes and provide instruction in a recreational activity.

Recreation supervisors oversee recreation leaders and plan, organize, and manage recreational activities to meet the needs of a variety of populations. These workers often serve as liaisons between the director of the park or recreation center and the recreation leaders. Recreation supervisors with more specialized responsibilities also may direct special activities or events or oversee a major activity, such as aquatics, gymnastics, or one or more performing arts.

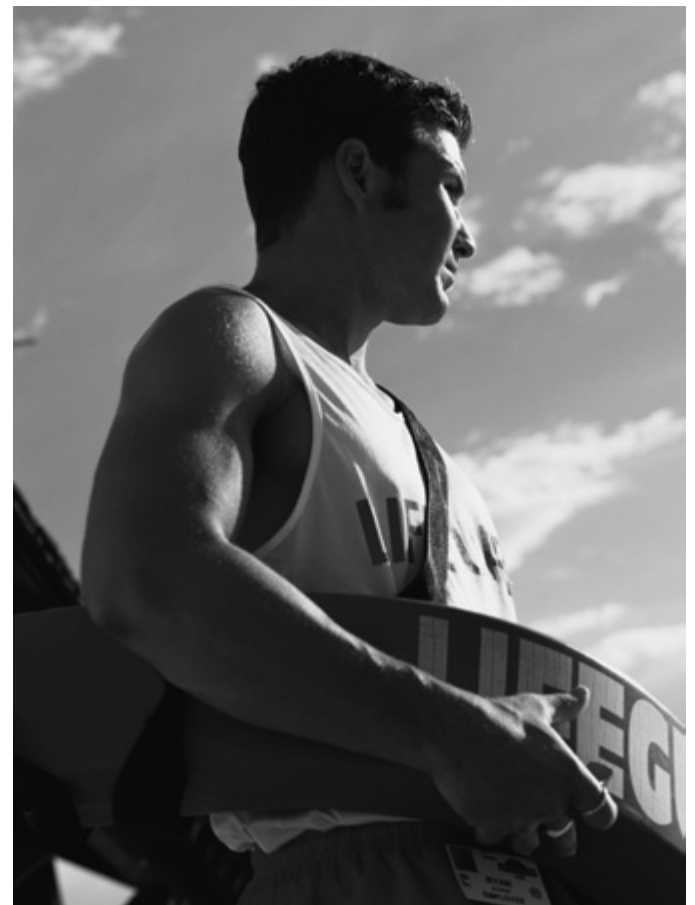
Directors of recreation and parks develop and manage comprehensive recreation programs in parks, playgrounds, and other settings. Directors usually serve as technical advisors to State and local recreation and park commissions and may be responsible for recreation and park budgets.

Work environment. Recreation workers work in a variety of settings—for example, a cruise ship, a nature park, a summer camp, or a playground in the center of an urban community. Many recreation workers spend most of their time outdoors and may work in a variety of weather conditions. Recreation directors and supervisors, however, typically spend most of their time in an office, planning programs and special events. Directors and supervisors generally engage in less physical activity than do lower level recreation workers. Nevertheless, recreation workers at all levels risk suffering injuries during physical activities.

Some recreation workers work about 40 hours a week. However, many people entering this field, such as camp counselors, may have some night and weekend work, irregular hours, and seasonal employment. In 2008, about 40 percent of these workers worked part time.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

The educational and training requirements for recreation workers vary widely with on the type of job. Full-time career positions usually require a college degree. Many jobs, however,



Many recreation workers spend most of their time outdoors in various weather conditions.

require demonstrated knowledge of the activity or can be learned with only a short period of on-the-job training.

Education and training. The educational needs for people entering into this occupational field vary widely depending on the job and level of responsibility. For activity specialists, it is more important to have experience and demonstrated competence in a particular activity, such as art or kayaking, than to have a degree. Camp counselors often are older teenagers or young adults who have experienced camping as a child and enjoy the camping experience. A degree is less important than the counselor’s maturity level, ability to work well with children and teens, and ability to make sure that they stay safe.

Those working in administrative positions for large organizations or public recreation systems may need a bachelor’s degree or higher. Full-time career professional positions usually require a college degree with a major in parks and recreation or leisure studies, but a bachelor’s degree in any liberal arts field may be sufficient for some jobs in the private sector. In industrial recreation, or “employee services” as it is more commonly called, companies that offer recreational activities for their employees prefer to hire those with a bachelor’s degree in recreation or leisure studies and a background in business administration.

Employers seeking candidates for some administrative positions favor those with at least a master’s degree in parks and recreation, business administration, or public administration. Most require at least an associate’s degree in recreation studies or a related field.

An associate’s or bachelor’s degree in a recreation-related discipline, along with experience, is preferred for most recreation supervisor jobs and is required for most higher level administrative jobs. Graduates of associate’s degree programs in parks and recreation, social work, and other human services disciplines also can enter some career recreation positions. High school graduates occasionally enter career positions, but doing so is not common.

Programs leading to an associate’s or bachelor’s degree in parks and recreation, leisure studies, or related fields are offered at several hundred colleges and universities. Many also offer master’s or doctoral degrees in the field. In 2009, 89 bachelor’s degree programs in parks and recreation were accredited by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). Accredited programs provide broad exposure to the history, theory, and practice of park and recreation management. Courses offered include community organization; supervision and administration; recreational needs of special populations, such as the elderly or disabled; and supervised fieldwork. Students may specialize in areas such as therapeutic recreation, park management, outdoor recreation, industrial or commercial recreation, and camp management.

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2008	Projected Employment, 2018	Change, 2008-2018	
				Number	Percent
Recreation workers	39-9032	327,500	375,700	48,200	15

(NOTE) Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

Specialized training or experience in a particular field, such as art, music, drama, or athletics, is an asset for many jobs. Some jobs also require certification. For example, a lifesaving certificate is a prerequisite for teaching or coaching water-related activities.

The large number of seasonal and part-time workers learn through on-the-job training.

Licensure and certification. The NRPA certifies individuals for professional and technical jobs. Certified park and recreation professionals must pass an exam. In order to qualify to take the exam, individuals need to (1) have earned a bachelor’s degree in a major such as recreation, park resources, or leisure services from a program accredited by the NRPA or have at least 1 year of experience if the program is not accredited; (2) have earned any other bachelor’s degree and have at least 3 years of relevant full-time work experience; or (3) have at least 5 years of full-time experience in the field. Continuing education is necessary to remain certified.

Many cities and localities require lifeguards to be certified. Training and certification details vary from State to State and county to county. Information on lifeguards is available from local parks and recreation departments.

Other qualifications. People planning careers in recreation should be outgoing, good at motivating people, and sensitive to the needs of others. Excellent health and physical fitness often are required, due to the physical nature of some jobs. Time management and the ability to manage others also is important.

Advancement. Recreation workers start their careers working with people. As they gain experience, they may get promoted to positions with greater responsibilities. Recreation workers with experience and managerial skills may advance to supervisory or managerial positions. Eventually, they may become the director of a recreation department.

Employment

Recreation workers held about 327,500 jobs in 2008, and many additional workers held summer jobs in the occupation. About 31 percent of recreation workers worked for local governments, primarily in park and recreation departments. About 16 percent of recreation workers were employed by nursing and residential care facilities, and another 10 percent were employed in civic and social organizations, such as the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts or the YMCA and YWCA.

Job Outlook

Faster than average growth is expected. Jobs opportunities for part-time, seasonal, and temporary recreation workers will be good, but competition will remain keen for career positions as recreation workers.

Employment change. Overall employment of recreation workers is projected to increase by 15 percent between 2008 and 2018, which is faster than the average for all occupations.

Although people will spend more time and money on recreation, budget restrictions in State and local government will limit the number of jobs added. Many of the new jobs will be in social assistance organizations and in nursing and residential care facilities. Civic and social organizations and fitness and sports centers will also contribute to growth.

Growth will be driven by the growing numbers of young and older Americans. The large numbers of births in recent years likely will increase the demand for recreation services for children, and retiring baby boomers are expected to have more leisure time, higher disposable incomes, and more concern for health and fitness than previous generations had. The latter factors should lead to an increasing demand for recreation services for baby boomers.

Job prospects. Applicants for part-time, seasonal, and temporary recreation jobs should have good opportunities, but competition will remain keen for career positions because the recreation field attracts many applicants and because the number of career positions is limited compared with the number of lower level seasonal jobs. Opportunities for staff positions should be best for people with formal training and experience in part-time or seasonal recreation jobs. Volunteer experience, part-time work during school, and a summer job are viewed favorably. Those with graduate degrees should have the best opportunities for supervisory or administrative positions. Job openings will stem from growth and the need to replace the large numbers of workers who leave the occupation each year.

Earnings

In May 2008, median annual wages of recreation workers who worked full time were \$21,960. The middle 50 percent earned between \$17,680 and \$28,810. The lowest paid 10 percent earned less than \$15,630, while the highest paid 10 percent earned \$37,730 or more. However, earnings of recreation directors and others in supervisory or managerial positions can be substantially higher. Most public and private recreation agencies provide full-time recreation workers with typical benefits; part-time workers receive few, if any, benefits. In May 2008, median annual wages in the industries employing the largest numbers of recreation workers were as follows:

Nursing care facilities	\$23,100
Individual and family services	22,260
Local government.....	21,890
Civic and social organizations.....	19,800
Other amusement and recreation industries	19,670

The large numbers of temporary, seasonal jobs in the recreation field typically are filled by high school or college students, generally do not have formal education requirements, and are open to anyone with the desired personal qualities. Employers compete for a share of the vacationing student labor force, and although salaries in recreation often are lower than those in other fields, the nature of the work and the opportunity to work outdoors are attractive to many.

Part-time, seasonal, and volunteer jobs in recreation include summer camp counselors, craft specialists, and afterschool and weekend recreation program leaders. In addition, many teachers and college students accept jobs as recreation workers when

school is not in session. The vast majority of volunteers serve as activity leaders at local day camp programs or in youth organizations, camps, nursing homes, hospitals, senior centers, and other settings.

Related Occupations

Other occupations that require leadership skills, as well as a desire to work with and help others, include the following:

- Athletes, coaches, umpires, and related workers
- Counselors
- Fitness workers
- Probation officers and correctional treatment specialists
- Psychologists
- Recreational therapists
- Social workers
- Teachers—self enrichment education

Sources of Additional Information

For information on jobs in recreation, contact employers such as local government departments of parks and recreation, nursing homes and other residential facilities, the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, and other local social or religious organizations.

For information on careers, certification, and academic programs in parks and recreation, contact:

- National Recreation and Park Association, 22377 Belmont Ridge Rd., Ashburn, VA 20148-4501. Internet: <http://www.nrpa.org>

For information about a career as a camp counselor, contact:

- American Camp Association, 5000 State Road 67 North, Martinsville, IN 46151-7902. Internet: <http://www.acacamps.org>

The Occupational Information Network (O*NET) provides information on a wide range of occupational characteristics. Links to O*NET appear at the end of the Internet version of this occupational statement, accessible at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/ocos058.htm>