
Recreation Workers

(O*NET 39-9032.00)

Significant Points

- The recreation field offers an unusually large number of part-time and seasonal job opportunities.
- Educational requirements range from a high school diploma to a graduate degree.
- Opportunities for part-time, seasonal, and temporary recreation jobs will be good, but competition will remain keen for full-time career positions.

Nature of the Work

People spend much of their leisure time participating in a wide variety of organized recreational activities, such as arts and crafts, the performing arts, camping, and sports. Recreation workers plan, organize, and direct these activities in local playgrounds and recreation areas, parks, community centers, religious organizations, camps, theme parks, and tourist attractions. Increasingly, recreation workers also are found in businesses where they organize and direct leisure activities for employees.

Recreation workers hold a variety of positions at different levels of responsibility. Workers who provide instruction and coaching in art, music, drama, swimming, tennis, or other activities may be called *activity specialists*.

Camp counselors lead and instruct children and teenagers in outdoor recreation, such as swimming, hiking, horseback riding, and camping. In addition, counselors 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.

Recreation leaders, who are responsible for a recreation program's daily operation, primarily organize and direct participants. They may lead and give instruction in dance, drama, crafts, games, and sports; schedule the use of facilities; keep records of equipment use; and ensure that recreation facilities and equipment are used properly.

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 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. (Workers in a related occupation, *recreational therapists*, help individuals to recover from or adjust to illness, disability, or specific social problems; this occupation is described elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Work environment. Recreation workers may work in a variety of settings—for example, a cruise ship, a woodland recreational park, a summer camp, or a playground in the center of a large urban community. Regardless of the setting, most recreation workers spend much 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.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

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

Education and training. Educational requirements for recreation workers range from a high school diploma—or sometimes less for those seeking summer jobs—to graduate degrees for some administrative positions in large public recreation systems. 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 prefer to hire those with a bachelor's degree in recreation or leisure studies and a background in business administration. Some college students work part time as recreation workers while earning degrees.

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.



Many recreation workers are only seasonally employed.

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Recreation workers	39-9032	320,000	360,000	41,000	13

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*.

Most required at least an associate degree in recreation studies or a related field.

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

Programs leading to an associate 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 2006, about 100 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, or camp management.

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; earn a bachelor's degree with a major in recreation, park resources, or leisure services from a program accredited by the NRPA or earn a bachelor's degree and have at least 5 years of relevant full-time work experience. Continuing education is necessary to remain certified.

Many areas require lifeguards to be certified. Training and certification details vary from State to State and county to county. Information on lifeguards is available from your local Parks and Recreation Department.

Other qualifications. People planning recreation careers should be outgoing, good at motivating people, and sensitive to the needs of others. Excellent health and physical fitness are often required, due to the physical nature of some jobs. Volunteer experience, part-time work during school, or a summer job can lead to a full-time career as a recreation worker.

Advancement. Recreation workers with experience and managerial skills may advance to supervisory or managerial positions.

Employment

Recreation workers held about 320,000 jobs in 2006, and many additional workers held summer jobs in the occupation. About 32 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 Red Cross.

Job Outlook

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

Employment change. Overall employment of recreation workers is projected to increase by 13 percent between 2006 and 2016, which is about as fast as the average for all occupations. Although people will spend more time and money on recreation, budget restrictions in State and local government will moderate the number of jobs added. Many of the new jobs will be in social assistance organizations and in nursing and residential care facilities.

Growth will be driven by retiring baby boomers who, with more leisure time, high disposable income, and concern for health and fitness, are expected to increase the demand for recreation services.

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. 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 2006, median annual earnings of recreation workers who worked full time were \$20,470. The middle 50 percent earned between \$16,360 and \$27,050. The lowest paid 10 percent earned less than \$14,150, while the highest paid 10 percent earned \$35,780 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 2006, median annual earnings in the industries

employing the largest numbers of recreation workers were as follows:

Nursing care facilities	\$21,510
Individual and family services	20,410
Local government	20,100
Other amusement and recreation industries	18,810
Civic and social organizations	17,920

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 after-school 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

Recreation workers must exhibit leadership and sensitivity when dealing with people. Other occupations that require similar personal qualities include counselors; probation officers and correctional treatment specialists; psychologists; recreational therapists; teachers—self enrichment education; athletes, coaches, umpires, and related workers; and social workers.

Sources of Additional Information

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

For career, certification, and academic program information in parks and recreation, contact:

► National Recreation and Park Association, 22377 Belmont Ridge Rd., Ashburn, VA 20148-4501.

Internet: <http://www.nrpa.org>

For career information about camp counselors, contact:

► American Camping Association, 5000 State Road 67 North, Martinsville, IN 46151-7902.

Internet: <http://www.acacamps.org>