

Essentials for the professional

Outdoor Program Administration

Principles and Practices



Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education

Geoff Harrison • Mat Erpelding

Editors

Outdoor Program Administration

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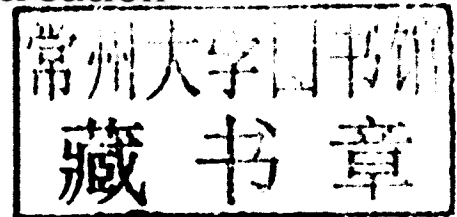
Outdoor Program Administration: Principles and Practices

**Association of Outdoor Recreation
and Education**

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Preface

As the outdoor recreation and education professions continue to become an essential part of an economically successful society, the need for effective and experienced administrators increases. Outdoor program administrators lead programs in universities, municipalities, nonprofit organizations, military, social services, and parks and recreation. The diversity of programming associated with outdoor recreation requires professionals to be adept at working in complex environments. The Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education (AORE) has become the definitive source for current and emerging recreation professionals in the various sectors. *Outdoor Program Administration: Principles and Practices* provides professionals with the information needed for improving administrative practices.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Outdoor Program Administration: Principles and Practices has four parts:

» **Part I: Outdoor Program Foundations.** Chapter 1 discusses what is necessary for becoming an effective outdoor program administrator. Chapter 2 presents a history of programming as it relates to outdoor recreation. This chapter is valuable for administrators working on proposals and presentations to supervisors. Chapter 3 explores the types of programs and the sectors where outdoor recreation is commonly offered. While some programs are considered historical models, determining the type of program an organization will operate affects future planning. Chapter 4 discusses the future of outdoor recreation administration as increased demand and improved technology begin to influence the decisions administrators have to make.

» **Part II: Program Design and Implementation.** Chapter 5 covers the importance of viewing risk management as a gestalt process not limited to field programming. Chapter 6 details the basic techniques for establishing a vision statement and a mission statement when developing programs. Chapter 7 looks at the legal considerations for an outdoor

recreation administrator. Chapters 8 and 9 provide detailed information about financial operations and marketing techniques to increase program success. Chapter 10 provides extensive information about the process of gaining access and securing permits to public and private lands. Chapter 11 discusses current and future trends regarding environmental stewardship. Chapter 12 discusses considerations in writing effective field policies and procedures for those who supervise participants.

» **Part III: Staffing Considerations.** Chapter 13 discusses staff recruitment and supervision from the perspective of human resources. Chapter 14 is dedicated to the development and ongoing staff training necessary for maintaining a safe and successful outdoor program. Accurate evaluation of staff through the development of rubrics and measures is the focus of chapter 15.

» **Part IV: Facilities and Programs.** This part addresses issues specific to a host of outdoor recreation facilities and technical leadership programs:

- Challenge programs
- Special events
- Water-based programs
- Land-based programs
- Rental centers
- Climbing walls

Chapters 16 through 21 discuss specific programming and management aspects of each topic. Outdoor recreation administrators should understand the general management principles discussed in previous chapters and discipline-specific components detailed in these chapters.

AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK

The AORE worked hard to find professionals in administrative roles of the various sectors of outdoor recreation and education. Most of the chapters are coauthored. As a result of the extensive number of authors involved in this project, chapter presentations may vary. Proceeds from the book will benefit the Association of Outdoor Recreation and

Education, and most of the authors donated their authoring stipend back to the association.

CONSIDERATIONS

Administrators are concerned with the overall vision and direction of outdoor recreation programs. They are responsible for setting the course of the organization. *Managers* have discipline-specific skills in implementing policies, procedures, and directives to meet organizational objectives. Unfortunately, many outdoor recreation administrators need to function in both roles consistently as the result of an organization's staffing hierarchy. As a consequence, the term *administrator* is used to designate a professional in charge of an outdoor recreation program in any sector (nonprofit, commercial, government). *Management* is referenced as a set of skills essential for effective administration. This book addresses a range of programs, and it is recognized that some programs will have both administrative responsibilities for setting the course for success and specific management responsibilities for ensuring various aspects of the daily operations are completed.

The four categories of skills—human, outdoor, educational, and management—are introduced in this text as a means of organizing the broad base

of knowledge and abilities required of outdoor recreation administrators. Each of these skill areas is addressed throughout the text; however, management skills serve as the focal point for the content of the text.

» **Audience.** This book serves as a desk reference for outdoor recreation administrators and as an upper-level textbook for students in outdoor recreation administration courses. This book is a reference to both field instructors and administrators alike.

» **General reference, not prescriptive.** While the content presented in this text is extensive, by no means is it an exhaustive compilation of all possible challenges faced by administrators. The perspective is generalized to a broad base of business sectors and outdoor program designs. This is not a prescriptive text that all outdoor program administrators must follow, because missions and delivery structures will vary from organization to organization.

» **Overlap.** While each chapter addresses specific topics, the amount of overlap across subjects is immense. A chapter might reference other areas in the book that cover a specific topic, and keep in mind that the index is the place to find common terms and their locations throughout the book.

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PART



Outdoor Program Foundations

The Outdoor Program Administrator

Geoff Harrison, MS, and Mat Erpelding, MA

Since the 1960s outdoor recreation programming has become increasingly more structured and professionalized. Outdoor activity participation has increased by 4.4 percent from an estimated 208 million to 217 million since 2000 (Cordell, 2008). This growth has fueled the still-emerging professional field of outdoor program administration. Whether the outdoor program administrator is serving at a university, a government municipal parks and recreation program, a nonprofit agency, or a military welfare and recreation (MWR) program, duties are multifaceted and require the ability to apply educational theories, human psychology, management practices, and outdoor skills. Outdoor program administrators work in environments that range from meeting with an advisory board at a retreat center to leading a group of participants up the summit ridge of a snow-capped peak. This book emphasizes the discipline-specific knowledge related to the operations and management of an outdoor program. This first chapter includes a brief introduction to the profession. Key sections in the chapter include the following:

- Outdoor program administration defined
- Outdoor program administrator defined
- Management skills

- Outdoor program administrator minimum skill competencies
- Skill acquisition for the emerging professional
- Professional maintenance

Although an outdoor program administrator should have extensive experience outdoors, outdoor skills are not the emphasis of this book. The mixed nature of workplace responsibilities requires outdoor recreation professionals to demonstrate effectiveness in the following dimensions: human skills, outdoor skills, management skills, and educational skills. The contents of this book, though targeted at administrative professionals working in the field of outdoor recreation, include common principles and practices transferable to many other administrative positions in the fields of recreation, tourism, and sport management. In this chapter we first discuss the skills one needs to be an effective outdoor program administrator; this is followed by a discussion of the work experience, training, and educational experience necessary for success in the field. This chapter also covers many of the unique responsibilities and issues that distinguish outdoor program administrators from other recreation professionals.

OUTDOOR PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION DEFINED

Outdoor program administration is the creation and implementation of programs that use outdoor environments for a deliberate recreational or educational experience. Outdoor program administrators are commonly responsible for the following types of programs:

- Adventure education
- Environmental education
- Outdoor education
- Guiding
- Military morale and welfare
- Municipal parks and recreation
- Wilderness therapy
- Summer camps

Outdoor program administration is a specialized profession because it might require both effective outdoor skills for working outside the office and effective management skills for working within an administration. Although the previous list of possible programs is not exhaustive, all of these programs have a common thread: Outdoor experiences are used deliberately for a variety of outcomes, including discipline-specific skill development, personal growth, environmental awareness, therapeutic outcomes, and instructional strategies.

For our purposes in this book, *administration* is defined as the identification of an organization's objectives and the effective acquisition, allocation, and maintenance of resources to meet the objectives. Resources used in pursuit of an organization's objectives include human labor and talent, financial assets, physical property, equipment, intellectual property, and public image. Among the most significant resources are the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the organization's outdoor program administrator.

OUTDOOR PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR DEFINED

As we have stated, the diversity of program types within the field of outdoor programming is extensive. Depending on the organization, administrative

positions include full-time, part-time, and seasonal work. Although titles and job descriptions vary across organizations, the scope of responsibilities among outdoor program administrators remains fairly consistent. An outdoor program administrator is responsible for establishing desired outcomes that support an organization's mission and then managing and maintaining resources to meet these desired outcomes. Based on the size and needs of an organization, this might require working both in the office as an administrator and in the field as an instructor.

To distinguish the physical locations in which an outdoor program administrator's duties take place, we'll use the terms "administrative" and "field." *Administrative* time is spent in an office environment focused on administrative and management duties necessary to maintain operations. *Field* time is spent working outdoors in a capacity directly related to providing a recreational experience to staff or participants. Field-time duties and responsibilities might include assessing staff competency, instructing adventure-based activities, and managing the logistics of a field program. Many positions require outdoor program administrators to spend an immense amount of time in the field. Depending on an organization's needs, field time may be either in addition to or in lieu of administrative time.

An effective outdoor program administrator requires foundational outdoor skills developed through formal education coupled with additional training, personal and vocational practice, ongoing personal reflection, and access to professional assessment and feedback. Because of the onsite or offsite nature of the job, the outdoor program administrator must be able to work effectively both in the office and in the field.

SKILL SETS FOR OUTDOOR PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS

The road to becoming an effective outdoor program administrator is challenging. With responsibilities ranging from paddling a class III river in a dry top to donning a tie for a meeting with upper management, the position of outdoor program administrator is arguably one of the most complex positions in the

recreation industry. Paul Nicolazzo's seminal work *Effective Outdoor Program Design and Management* (2007) states that "program administrators must have a strong field based background, and should develop human, educational, and outdoor skills concurrently to be a quality field leader." Thus, prior to becoming an administrator, appropriate field experience—as a participant, as a leader, and as a personal adventurer—is a requisite. An outdoor program administrator should be competent in all three areas before advancing to an administrative role.

The three skill sets identified by Nicolazzo (2007) represent the essential skills of an outdoor field professional. However, to account for the transition from field-based work to administrative work, we have added a fourth skill set—management skills. This book focuses on the management skills necessary for effective outdoor program administration.

Isolating skills into a category can be challenging; many times there is significant overlap. Figure 1.1 indicates the interdependent relations among the four skill sets that make up outdoor program administration.

Complex abilities such as leadership, decision making, and judgment are represented by effective integration and application of each skill set. The more the skill sets overlap, and are applied in coordinated unison, the better an administrator will perform.

Outdoor Skills

Outdoor skills comprise the unique job qualifications required for positions in the outdoor recreation industry. The discipline-specific competencies needed to effectively guide, lead, and train others are becoming increasingly complex because of the endless variety of adventure-based activities offered to customers. For example, an outdoor program administrator might offer trips that demand instructor skill in rock climbing, mountaineering, skiing, caving, bicycle touring, canoeing, whitewater rafting, and sea kayaking.

Although administrators need not be competent in all activities, they must be able to make accurate program assessments for each outdoor activity their organization offers. Ultimately, these assessments will form the basis for risk-management strategies, training plans, and program offerings.

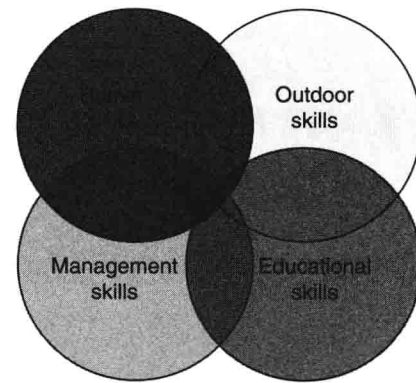


Figure 1.1 Outdoor program administration requires professionals to integrate four areas of skill competency. The intersection of the skill areas indicates effective leadership, experience-based judgment, critical and creative thinking, and decision making.

Nearly all of the aforementioned discipline-specific skills have a common set of basic outdoor skills that are needed to facilitate successful outcomes. Thus, at a minimum, competency in basic outdoor living skills is essential to being an effective outdoor administrator. However, identifying a concise and complete list of essential outdoor skills has been a subject of debate among outdoor professionals, with no uniform agreement. See figure 1.2 for the authors' listing of minimum outdoor skills required to be an effective outdoor program administrator.

Human Skills

Human skills are complex and not limited to outdoor programming. Rather, effective human skills are required for employment in any industry. These skills are the essential intrapersonal awareness and interpersonal relationships skills necessary to engage and lead others. Engaging supervisors, staff, and participants requires an ability to recognize how others are interpreting situational factors and then to react appropriately. Figure 1.2 includes a list of the minimum human skills needed to be an effective outdoor program administrator.

Additionally, human skills include the development of ethics, or morals. Developed through life experiences, ethics drive individual behavior and decision making. Effective human skills allow

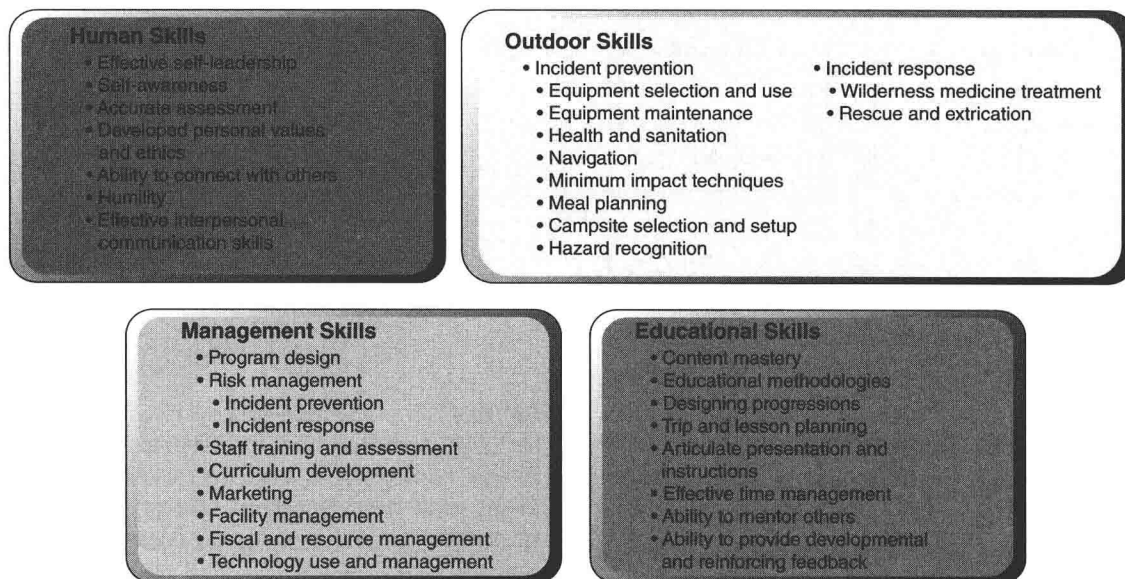


Figure 1.2 Minimum skill competencies—human, outdoor, management, and educational.

administrators to construct a workplace environment that honors individual differences by creating a culture supportive of civil dialogue.

Educational Skills

Similar to human skills, the educational skill set is not limited to outdoor recreation. Educational skills are essential for effectiveness in any workplace setting. Outdoor program administrators need educational skills so they can effectively adapt teaching

styles and selection of course content to meet the competency levels exhibited by participants. Educational skills include the ability to demonstrate detailed content knowledge of the topic, design appropriate lessons, verbally articulate information, design a logical progression, and either formally or informally mentor others.

Many times, educational skills represent the difference between success and failure on a trip or program. Whether the administrator is teaching a participant, a subordinate, or a superior, the ability to effectively deliver information to others is essential. Educational skills require content mastery, which can represent a significant challenge if an administrator is operating outside of his or her area of competency. Administrators should have content mastery in basic outdoor skills as well as in other technical skills such as climbing, kayaking, caving, or mountain biking. This is why past and present field time is important to the effective development and maintenance of outdoor skills. Figure 1.2 includes a list of the minimum educational skills needed to be an effective outdoor program administrator.



Bruce Saxman

Outdoor program administrators must possess educational skills so they can select appropriate course content to meet the competency levels of their participants.

Management Skills

Management skills include the business functions and duties that comprise the inner workings of outdoor administration. The nuts and bolts of

outdoor program administration are not glamorous, but these skills are necessary for programs to be successful, financially viable, and incident free.

Common outdoor program business models require administrators to oversee a variety of onsite and offsite businesses, such as outdoor equipment rental centers, challenge courses, indoor climbing walls, retreat centers, trip and education programs, summer camps, and leadership development programs. Management skills are often grouped by their seemingly similar duties, but in practice they regularly require distinctly different approaches and applications (see figure 1.3).

Business acumen is key in this skill set. Administrators are responsible for managing an organization's resources and achieving goals and directives. Fiscal management must be an area of strength for an outdoor program administrator because the com-

bined budgets of outdoor programs can easily range from under \$20,000 a year to well over \$2,000,000 a year. The varied facilities and equipment managed by the outdoor program administrator requires an understanding of facility design and maintenance, technical outdoor equipment, and vehicles. Administrators need competence in human resource practices to effectively hire and train staff. They must also be able to accurately assess their employees' skills because there is always a chance an employee will need to make critical decisions about the health and safety of participants. Competency in program design, developing policy and procedure manuals, and marketing are all skills that administrators should possess because they need to be able to develop programs that participants want and that their staff is competent to lead.

Figure 1.3 Management Skills

- **Program design:** The process of moving from concepts, anchored by the organization's macrostructure (vision, mission, values, and objectives), to deliverable products or services.
- **Risk management:** The design and implementation of plans, procedures, guidelines, and policies to eliminate, minimize, and manage exposure to loss while pursuing program outcomes.
 - **Incident prevention:** The practice of obtaining desired outcomes while avoiding the loss of resources (fiscal, physical, human, perceived). Incident prevention is the core priority of the outdoor recreation administrator.
 - **Incident response:** The prescribed and purposeful actions employed by the outdoor recreation administrator to manage an incident regardless of severity or where it occurs (office or field).
- **Fiscal and resource management:** The practice of maximizing effective use of resources while maintaining the financial records and procedures of the organization.
- **Staff training and assessment:** The process through which human, educational, outdoor, and (at times) management skills are imparted upon and measured to ensure that staff effectiveness and overall program quality meet desired outcomes.
- **Curriculum and program development:** The creation and implementation of course content and learning progressions that are combined to minimize risk and meet the desired outcomes of a program.
- **Facility management:** The process of managing a complete array of outdoor program resources, such as offices, rental programs, climbing walls, challenge courses, camps, water fronts, pools, vehicles, and trailers.
- **Marketing:** The activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.
- **Technology use and management:** The process of applying specialized technical tools and equipment to improve services, provide new programs, and minimize risk of loss.