

Camp Caraway Retreat Planning Guide



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Introduction

Groups choosing to have a retreat experience are often confused by a lot of information given in sporadic doses prior to the actual event. Caraway Conference Center and Camp has created this document in an attempt to assist your group with the planning process of the retreat. Our desire is that you will be able to effectively and efficiently plan your retreat in a manner that is enjoyable and easy.

Why Have a Retreat?

Choosing to have a group retreat can be one of the most meaningful programs of the year for your organization. The growth that is created during a retreat can be long-term. Furthermore, the process by which this growth occurs is often positive, memorable, and unique. Retreats are held for group growth, but also occur for a variety of other reasons.

Organizations facilitating group retreats at Caraway include churches, schools, and non-profit organizations. Their reasons for having a retreat are as varied as the organizations themselves. We host groups who educate their membership on everything from speaking German to learning the status of the local owl population. We have also seen groups here for very deep spiritual experiences including summer camps and men's get-aways. Groups come for different reasons, but the experience usually has some things in common. These bonds include making memories, meeting friends, strengthening relationships, learning, and growth.

Typically, Caraway hosts the following retreat types: School Trips, Church Group Events, and Non-profit Meetings.

Where Do We Go?

Choosing the location is vital to the success of your retreat. Different facilities offer different experiences. In Randolph County alone (where Caraway is located) there are nine different camps and/or conference centers. These facilities offer differences in lodging, activities, food services, and overall campus usability. It is important to determine what you want from your retreat before booking a site. Issues to discuss include the food service, meeting space, activities available, all fees, interaction with other groups, and available staff. It is always a good idea to take a campus tour prior to booking the retreat. Also, be aware of the facility reservation policies.

Caraway offers groups lodging, meals, meeting space, activities, and consistent staff presence for guests. Additional activities are available for additional fees.

Who's in the Group?

Make sure that you are aware of the dynamics in your group. Ask your self; how do they get along? What are there needs? What do they want from a retreat? What do they need from a retreat? What do you hope to gain from the retreat?

Is your group struggling with anything (Examples: Communication, leadership, teamwork, etc.)? How can you tailor your activities, discussions, goals or theme to address the areas you see as the ones your group needs to address?

Individuals develop throughout their lives, physically, spiritually, intellectually, and emotionally. When planning a retreat, program, or activity for a group it can be helpful to keep in mind the levels of development within your group. This will affect how they respond to your programming.

Let's take a brief look at children and youth:

7 to 9 year olds:

- Attention span of 10 -15 minutes
- Enjoy making things
- Like team competition
- Active, hands-on learners
- Curious, adventure seeking
- Need practice making decisions
- Sensitive to criticism

15 to 18 year olds:

- Want independence from parents, other adults
- Able to assume greater responsibility
- Want respect from peers and adults
- Trying to establish personal identity
- Self-conscious
- Increased ability to think abstractly, logically
- Give more time that you think necessary for them to respond to question.

10 to 12 year olds:

- Great energy, but may tire quickly
- Starting to have 'crushes' (more likely girls than boys)
- Attention span up to 20 minutes
- Creative, good imaginations
- Like challenges
- Sensitive to criticism
- Becoming better decision-makers
- Demand adults follow same rules as them

12 to 15 year olds:

- May become easily tired
- Can assume perspective of others, step into their shoes
- Self-conscious
- Want to be like everyone else, a part of peer group
- May be less willing to take risks
- Give more time than you think necessary for them to respond to questions.

Group Goals

Choosing the goals for your retreat is one of the most important steps of the planning process. What do you think your group needs? Remember to consider and include aspects of the needs you see in the group dynamics. Your goals might also address educational topics your group needs. Remember that goals need to be **S.M.A.R.T.:**

Specific – Making vague and broad goals will lead you down the road to disappointment or dissatisfaction. What do you want to achieve with your group in the amount of time that you have? Give your goals some qualifiers that answer the questions following questions. Who? What? When? Where? Why? Which?

Measurable – Create your goals around quantities or qualities that can be measured. If you have nothing to measure, then you have nothing to use in gauging the progress while chasing your goals.

Attainable – Are your goals beyond the reach of your group at this time? Have you stepped outside the bounds of your own skills as a leader/facilitator? To have a successful and meaningful retreat, make sure you have set goals that fit your abilities/attitudes and those of your group.

Realistic – Do your goals aim for things that are impossible or unreasonable for the group at hand?

Timely – Make sure to give your goals specific time frames. This will make your goals more measurable and will help provide you with some built in flexibility. If one activity is taking longer than expected, you can check the performance of your group and look ahead for a timeslot to borrow time from considering what part of your plans the group will complete ahead of time.

Example: The goal that I like to give groups, as an example, is that I would like to learn how to fly like a superhero. Is this a S.M.A.R.T. goal? Let's use the steps to make it into one.

Goal: I am going to learn how to fly like a superhero.

Specific: I am going to learn how to fly by running off the roof of my house three times a week.

Measurable: I will learn to fly by running off the roof of my house three days a week and staying in the air for a distance of 10 feet.

Attainable: I will learn to fly by running off the end of my deck three days a week.

Realistic: I will learn to fly by taking lessons from an experienced pilot at the airport three days a week.

Timely: I will learn to fly by taking lessons from an experienced pilot at the airport three days a week over six months.

This final version is a S.M.A.R.T. goal, but not the same goal I thought I wanted in the beginning. I realized along the way that learning to fly by hurling myself off of a building would be hazardous to my well being. It did not turn out to be realistic for me to learn to fly without some sort of aircraft. After adding in some qualifiers and time frames I had found my S.M.A.R.T. goal.

A Retreat Theme

Once you have the goals for your retreat, you have a guideline to use in planning the rest of your retreat. Coming up with a theme that incorporates your goals will give you a master design to follow with the rest of your planning steps. A simple approach to choosing a theme would be to use a topic your group needs to address. A theme designed from such a topic (Unity for example) or a smaller integral piece (Such as communication, personality types, and personal strengths) would make a good starting point for your planning. As with your goals, don't be afraid to let your theme change as you think it through.

Be sure to stick to the theme for the entire retreat. Center activities around the main topics. Generally, retreats are brief experiences lasting not much longer than 48 hours. To have the theme be a focal point of all programs and activities will allow it to be more relevant and memorable. It is a good idea to look for ways to incorporate the theme into the facility. Would it be nice if the facility could fix a special meal that may tie in with your chosen topics? Will the challenge course facilitators agree to debrief the activities around the chosen theme? Be sure to ask these questions and others as you implement your retreat topic.

Group Activities

Activity time is necessary for a successful retreat. Activities allow you to break up the lecture or study time and get folks moving. Activities can be as simple as a hike in the woods or as complex as a high challenge course experience. When planning the activity portion of the retreat, be sure to ask good questions about the group. How active is the group? What activities will they be satisfied with? What will stimulate the group after a long learning session? Also, ask yourself good activity related questions. What activities can you provide yourself? What activities can the facility provide? Are there added fees for activities? Are there free activities available? This is where a pre-visit will come in handy again.

Caraway Conference Center and Camp offers groups a mixture of free activities and activities that include a minimal additional fee. Free activities include gym use, recreation equipment (soccer goals, balls, etc...), fishing, canoeing, hiking trails, volleyball courts, horseshoes, and recreation fields. Activities for additional fees include the challenge courses, paintball, the rock climbing wall, zip lines, teambuilding activities, the Blob, and the pool.

Be sure to ask about restrictions, waivers, equipment needed, appropriate dress, and other requirements when booking activities.

Learning Styles of the Group

There are many different learning styles, personality types, and attention spans in any given group. Planning your retreat to incorporate parts of several of these will increase the effectiveness of your program. You could include hands on activities, artistic elements, visual presentations, small groups, individual based elements, or large group activities. If you implement the parts of your retreat in different styles, you will increase the percentage of participants who will feel that they have benefited in some way by attending. *What follows is one interpretation of different learning styles.*

Logical/Mathematical—This intelligence likes to deal with numbers and abstract patterns. Often this intelligence is referred to as scientific reasoning. These learners like to read, write and tell stories, play word games, use computers, debate, and write in journals.

Intrapersonal—This intelligence is comfortable with self-reflection, thinking about thinking, and spirituality. It involves the knowledge of inner feelings and emotional responses. These learners prefer independent, self-paced study, journal keeping, and individualized projects.

Musical—This intelligence is based on an enjoyment of rhythmic and tonal patterns. People with this intelligence enjoy listening and performing music. These learners enjoy singing, listening to music, playing musical instruments, and respond to music and group singing.

Spatial—The key elements of this intelligence are the sense of sight and the ability to form mental images and pictures in the mind. These learners enjoy drawing, building, the design and creation of things, looking at pictures, and playing with machines.

Linguistic—This intelligence uses words and language effectively and well. People with this intelligence enjoy all the possibilities of exploring and express realities through words through writing, reading, talking, and listening.

Interpersonal – This intelligence responds well to working with others. The people who have this intelligence are able to work cooperatively and have a sense of empathy for the feelings and experiences of others. They enjoy cooperative games, board games, group brainstorming and problem solving, peer coaching, and interpersonal interaction.

Bodily/Kinesthetic—This intelligence uses the body to express emotion and to articulate ideas and concepts. These people learn well through movement, touching, using body language, sports and physical games, drama, dance, using clay, and building projects.

Naturalist—This intelligence is attuned to the natural world and uses all senses to enjoy the creation. These learners enjoy the study of nature, identifying cultural artifacts, collecting, sorting, and observing variation of objects in nature.

Retreat Free Time

Free time is a very important part of any retreat. You can provide activities for people to choose from or leave it open. Some people learn best by being completely immersed for hours on end, but others need time to process and will have shorter attention spans. No matter what ages you are working with, allow the members of your group some time to themselves to reflect on the material, fellowship, take care of personal needs, and rest their minds and bodies. Short 5-10 minute breaks throughout your sessions is a good addition, but make sure to give a 1-2 hour break each day at least to give your group the time it needs to energize.

Staffing

What supervision ratio do you need for your group (if applicable)? How many volunteers, chaperones, or other leaders will you need for your event? Do you need anyone with specific skills, such as music, game facilitation, Bible study leadership, etc.? Make sure to have your staff commit to the event a certain amount of time before the day of your retreat. Also line up several alternates in case one of your critical staff has a last minute change and is unable to attend.

Also, ask the facility what staff they provide. Is there staff on-site during the entire retreat? If not, ask what the group responsibilities for the retreat are. What do you do in the case of an emergency? Do you know the location of a local medical facility? Do you know what to do in the event of a maintenance or housekeeping need? Be sure to ask good questions and be prepared for all scenarios.

Accommodations

What sort of space do you need for your retreat? Remember to consider your meeting space and technology needs, sleeping areas and arrangements, eating space, and any requirements for your planned activities. Ask the facility detailed questions such as; Is linen provided? Are there additional fees for technological items? What if I need special accessibility arrangements? What restrictions are there in the lodging space?

Caraway offers a variety of lodging options in our camp and our conference center.

Food

Will the food be provided at the location you have chosen? If so, have you included this in your pricing structure for your participants, or are you handling this cost through your organization? If meals will not be provided through the hosting entity, will you have participants bring their own food? If not, you will need to come up with the menus, grocery lists, and food costs to include in your planning and expenses. Caraway does not allow groups to prepare their own meals. Our reasonable fees allow groups to focus on other areas of preparation.

Pricing

Be sure to ask; What is the total cost for your event at the location of your choice? When divided amongst your participants, does this provide a cost per person that you feel is manageable for the members of your group? Do you have the capability to subsidize this amount at all? Are there any additional costs or unforeseen charges? Do you need to collect deposits from your participants in order to meet a deposit deadline for your registration at the chosen facility? Will you cover the cost of your chaperones, or are you expecting them to pay their own way? Do you have any sources of donations that can be put to use?

Taking Care of You

Delegate, delegate, delegate! Trying to plan an entire retreat, especially if it is last minute, on your own is an exhausting prospect. Starting a retreat in which you are functioning as the facilitator when you are already tired will not lead to a pleasant experience for you, and possibly your group. Start your planning early in order to account for unforeseen challenges along the way. Find volunteers who are willing to commit to helping with the planning and/or running the event. When you have everything done ahead of time, and the volunteers lined up to help you will feel more prepared for the event, and more relaxed or able to enjoy yourself as your retreat takes place.

Conclusion

Taking the time to thoroughly plan your event ahead of time will ensure that you and your staff will spend less time worrying about details during the event itself. This will ensure that everyone can have a more meaningful time and your event will be a greater success having not burned out your staff and yourself. When expectations are met, everyone has a much more positive experience!