

**Canadian Sport Policy Renewal  
Consultations 2011  
Discussion paper on diversity (targeted populations)**

**Background**

The make-up of Canadian society is diverse, whether it is in terms of age, ethnic origin, religion, culture, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and physical or mental disability, and for some of these populations, increasingly so. This diversity can enhance and enrich the Canadian sport experience, but it can also be a source of uncertainty and concern. Diversity in the sport context can impact on policy development, infrastructure, program delivery, training, and resource allocation. As noted in the Department of Canadian Heritage 2010 environmental scan, “the continued diversification of Canadian society poses challenges for sport organizations and sport program delivery.”<sup>1</sup>

There is general consensus, as expressed in the 2002 Canadian Sport Policy (CSP), that sport be accessible to **all** Canadians. In this context, there is a need to develop strategies to include those who have been so far absent or under-represented on the sport scene.

One of the principles highlighted in the Canadian Sport policy is that sport is based on equity and access: “Sport is welcoming and inclusive, offering an opportunity to participate without regard to age, gender, race, language, sexual orientation, disability, geography, or economic circumstances”<sup>2</sup>. However, despite this diversity of considerations, the 2002 Canadian Sport Policy focused on increasing participation for four under-represented populations: women, aboriginal people, persons with a disability, and visible minorities. Out of those four groups, the F-P/T governments devoted meaningful attention to only the first three of these populations.

The impact of the CSP to increase participation by under-represented groups remains questionable. The Evaluation of the CSP final report indicates that other than for women and girls, no baseline data is available and no targets were set for the remaining three under-represented groups, making it difficult to assess any measure of progress.

The CSP renewal provides an opportunity to re-visit our objectives for a fully inclusive sport system, as well as to explore strategies to achieve that vision.

**Definitions**

For the purposes of this discussion paper, diversity is defined as follows:

*Diversity reflects the richness of human differences and encompasses both the visible and invisible differences among people with respect to, but not limited to, gender; age; ethno-culture; socio-economic status; mental, cognitive and physical abilities; sexual orientation; religion and spiritual practices; world view; family status; educational background; appearance; group affiliation; and organizational affiliation.*

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<sup>1</sup> Environmental scan 2010: Trends and Issues in Canada and in Sport, Policy Research Group, Department of Canadian Heritage, August 2010, p. 17

<sup>2</sup> The Canadian Sport Policy, May 24, 2002, p. 13

The term “under-represented groups” refers to those populations that are not represented in sport to the same level (%) as they are represented in Canadian society.

### **General considerations**

- The primary focus on increasing participation implies that success is based on achieving “adequate” representation, without regard to the quality of the sport experience.
- Open door policies that simply indicate a program or facility is accessible to all are not sufficient to attract and retain participants from all under-represented groups. The distinction between being open to all and pro-actively taking measures to accommodate under-represented groups is an important one because it affects the ultimate outcome.
- There is a need to set up mechanisms, at all levels of the sport system, to find out who is not participating and why not.

### **Challenges**

The challenges in addressing diversity issues are varied and complex. A few key ones are:

- Data gaps - Sport participation rates and trends among adults with disabilities, ethno-cultural groups and Aboriginal peoples are not known (CSP evaluation report, p.20). Without an ability to collect data that permits participation to be monitored and evaluated, establishing targets is an arbitrary and pointless exercise. We need a better understanding of the barriers for each specific group.
- Complexity - Exclusion or under-representation can seldom be attributed to one single factor such as race, language or socio-economic status. It is most often a combination of factors that affect under-representation. Barriers may differ within one targeted population, from one individual to another, or from one region to another, so any targeted population cannot be treated as one homogeneous group. Furthermore, an individual may belong to two or more different under-represented groups. The reasons underlying non-participation may stem from discrimination, accessibility or lack of active engagement, each requiring a different solution.
- Differing priorities – the desire to target specific populations may vary according to the region, the sport, but also the level of involvement within the sport system (eg. women may be underrepresented in coaching positions at the high performance level but adequately represented as participants at the grassroots level)
- Representation – there are either multiple organizations or an absence of organizations to represent the interests of a specific under-represented group. For example, there is no national organization representing the interests of visible minorities in sport.
- Capacity - volunteer-based sport organizations may lack either the resources, the knowledge and expertise, or the commitment to develop and implement strategies for the inclusion of under-represented groups

## **Possible approaches and considerations**

Given the challenges outlined above, the task of developing a fully inclusive sport system needs to be addressed by both governments and sport organizations. The following suggested approaches are by no means exhaustive and are intended to stimulate reflection and discussion.

### 1. "Place-based" or multi-faceted approach

All groups are being addressed but by different stakeholders and/or at different levels or to different degrees, according to their specific circumstances (eg. a Western Coast community may choose to focus on increasing participation by the Asian population, while an Atlantic community may decide to devote resources to involve youth-at-risk or persons with a disability)

Considerations:

- organizational or jurisdictional flexibility in terms of priority setting and resource allocation
- challenge of collecting nation-wide data and establishing overall measurable objectives
- need for mechanism to keep track of progress for the various groups
- ability of organizations to assess who is being left out in their service area
- possibility of addressing individuals who belong to more than one under-represented groups

### 2. Targeting specific populations

In this model all partners prioritize the same target populations, as was done in the 2002 Canadian Sport Policy.

Considerations:

- opportunity to collaborate on common or complementary strategies and to pool resources
- need to establish criteria and parameters to determine which groups should be targeted
- some populations remain on the sidelines
- organizations adopting the CSP are committing to address the identified priority populations which may not align with their own priorities

### 3. Focus on barriers

This approach focuses on the critical barriers across various groups. If, for example, cost, transportation and discrimination are determined to be the most significant barriers to participation, the strategy would focus on addressing these barriers.

Considerations:

- opportunity to address under-representation by various groups simultaneously
- need research to validate what are the most important barriers
- strategy to address a specific barrier would vary according to the environment
- collaborative approach and opportunity to pool resources
- possibility of addressing individuals who belong to more than one under-represented groups

### **Questions for reflection**

- How significant for your organization is the goal of increasing the participation of under-represented groups in sport? Please explain.
- Is there a need to address all population groups that are currently under-represented, or should priority groups be established? Why or why not?
- If priority groups are established, what criteria or parameters should be used to determine them?
- Should the priority groups be the same for all governments and sport organizations or should a more context-specific approach be adopted based on the particular demographics in a specific sport or community?