

Increasing Sport Participation Among Members of Underrepresented Groups:

Evidence-based Ideas for National and Provincial/Territorial Sport and Recreation Organizations

Why this resource?

You are probably passionate about sport and ensuring that others have the opportunity to enjoy it as much as you do. Imagine a world where you would like to participate but cannot due to your cultural, racial, or religious identity, your gender or gender identity, your physical abilities, your age, your household income, your sexual orientation, your unfamiliarity with Canadian culture and practices, or your geographic location.

You can help

This resource, along with its companion resources for Policy Makers and Local Practitioners, offers practical solutions for you to improve the chances that members of groups that may have been left out of sport in the past feel welcome, engaged, and supported.



How to use this Resource

The ideas in this resource are aimed primarily at national and provincial/territorial sport and recreation organizations. However that does not mean that ideas that are primarily targeted at one group are not at all relevant to another.

No one idea will create sufficient change, but over time, individual actions will accumulate and generate impact. Users are advised to start with those that are easy to do and add other relevant actions incrementally as they and their organizations are ready. All ideas can and should be tailored to the context.

Sport is about more than training and performance, and participation is about more than just the number of participants who show up to be counted. Quality, positive sport participation increases the chances of continued engagement, and includes experiential aspects related to inclusion and community integration including:

- **Autonomy, Mastery, and Challenge;**
- **Belongingness;**
- **Engagement and Meaning.**

The sections that follow present ideas for action organized around these concepts. As these are not mutually exclusive, there are no clear cut boundaries and there is overlap between them.



Autonomy, Mastery & Challenge

Introduce basic skills and improve physical literacy

- ◊ Avoid interruptions in skills development and participation, particularly where the cost of fees is a barrier.
- ◊ Recognize that many children, youth and adults have not had the opportunity to build basic physical literacy skills at an early age.
- ◊ Offer learn-to programs and basic skills development programs in non-competitive, supportive environments to all ages, ability levels and backgrounds.
- ◊ Establish age and skill level tiered divisions which can help familiarize new participants to sport and ensure proper facilitation of skill development.

Promote Positive Early Experiences

- ◊ Create opportunities that instill feelings of both success and challenge.
- ◊ Work with school boards to support school that build skills, and include everyone.
- ◊ Integrate Sport for Life principles into policies, procedures and programs.
- ◊ Examine registration systems to ensure the process is easy to navigate and uses inclusive language.

Offer a Variety of Sport Experiences

- ◊ Recognize a broad definition of sport and offer a range of culturally appropriate sports, recreation and physical activity opportunities.
- ◊ Ensure programming offers variety, including sports of interest to girls, those that use different skills and abilities, and those from Indigenous and other cultures.
- ◊ Develop size categories, such as in wrestling, rather than gender or age categories in activities where the size of competitors is a concern.
- ◊ Extend opportunities for people with disabilities beyond Paralympic pathways.
- ◊ Ensure there are opportunities that match the desired level of challenge and that are consistent with abilities, skills and reasons for participating.

Adapt and Modify

- ◊ Provide people with disabilities choice in their level of integration and inclusion.
- ◊ Provide appropriate, adapted programming, facilities, activities, equipment and rules to accommodate different skill levels and the choices and needs of participants (e.g., rules, net height, size of field of play, level of assistance) so that everyone is able to participate (see sidebar).
- ◊ Design and promote appropriate training and development models for persons with disabilities that can readily be implemented by athletes, coaches and volunteers.

Address Cost Issues

- ◊ Ensure access to financial supports for all those who wish to participate.
- ◊ Investigate and implement respectful and dignified application processes for subsidies and ensure that assistance provides long-term support.
- ◊ Work with Jumpstart, KidSport, local, provincial/territorial, and federal governments, sport bodies and local businesses to help fund the costs of participation.
- ◊ Explore and encourage private and not for profit investment or grants for equipment and programming and connect families with that assistance.



Belongingness

Co-create Programming

- ◊ Establish an advisory committee for each target audience, involving partners and community members from various sectors, professions and range of potential participants.
- ◊ Create a safe space for committee members to contribute and share their knowledge, skills, desires and beliefs and to co-create program and resource offerings that would be interesting, fun and meaningful to their community.
- ◊ Engage community members to promote programming and recruit participants.
- ◊ Consult with members of underrepresented groups to determine what sport skills and knowledge they can share.

Celebrate & Promote Diversity

- ◊ Promote sports that embrace diversity and open them to all participants.
- ◊ Link sport participation with traditional Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing ,and with cultural learning.
- ◊ Facilitate inter-cultural dialogue among and between coaches and players to learn about each other's cultural backgrounds, lives, and interests outside of athletics.
- ◊ Recognize, acknowledge and promote special days and events such as the Government of Canada's National AccessAbility Week, International Day of Persons with Disabilities, International Day to End Racism and Gay Pride celebrations.
- ◊ Raise awareness and changing attitudes towards people with disabilities through the Paralympic School Day and FUNDamentals programs.
- ◊ Consider the timing of cultural festivals, holidays and religious observances when scheduling events.
- ◊ Develop Indigenous athletes and showcase their culture and traditions by supporting Indigenous Games at the competitive and recreational levels.
- ◊ Encourage newcomers to share their knowledge and skills of their home-country sport both with others of their cultural background and beyond.

Adopt an Intersectoral Approach

- ◊ Jointly work with community partners and public health to promote sports participation as part of a healthy lifestyle and work collaboratively in including sport as part of broader health promotion programs.
- ◊ Work with organizations who have direct contact with target audiences to understand members' sport inclusion needs and to spread the message about inclusivity in sport.
- ◊ Work with partners to prevent and appropriately respond to sport injuries and concussions, eating disorders, substance abuse, doping, bullying harassment, and aggressive parents.
- ◊ Work with health care professionals to identify adaptation needs and delivery strategies for people with disabilities.



Understanding Intersectionality

In taking steps to becoming more inclusive, it is important to acknowledge that many group members identify with one or more additional groups at the same time (for example, an Indigenous woman, or a new Canadian who has a disability, or a transgender older adult living with limited economic means). This identifying with more than one group is called intersectionality. Individuals sharing a common identity may differ importantly in terms of ethnicity, language, age, religion, gender identity, sexual identity, generation, migration history, socio-economic background and other sociodemographic and individual variables. The interaction of these play a significant and complex role in sport participation. An important factor in inclusion and engaging participants is understanding the multiple intersecting and overlapping identities that may contribute to their feelings of exclusion from sport, and, more importantly, getting to know their individual needs.

Ensure Cultural Sensitivity and Safety

- ◊ Recognize the impact, privilege and interpretation of power; different cultures interpret the power relationship in different ways and based on different life experiences.
- ◊ Ensure that leaders are sensitive to their position as a leader or expert and enforce safe participation, demonstrate appropriate skills and encourage behaviours in ways that preserve participants' dignity, are equally applied, explain reasons for rules and techniques, and provide options for what to do rather than just telling what not to do.
- ◊ Ensure sensitivity to the unique needs of Indigenous participants when integrating them into mainstream sport.
- ◊ Listen to appreciate cultural, ability and gender appropriate understanding of sport and participation.
- ◊ Learn about culturally relevant sports and how to offer them.
- ◊ Understand that different cultures define the distinctiveness of physical activity, sport and recreation in varying degrees.

Promote an Environment of Inclusion

- ◊ Manage for diversity rather than expecting members of the target groups to fit the organization.
- ◊ Allocate responsibility for addressing inclusion issues to a specific position in your organization and involve them in decision making.
- ◊ Promote environments that are open, honest, respectful, inclusive, supportive, and accepting of differences and limitations, diversity of culture, abilities and ways of knowing.

- ◊ Offer programs based on human rights rather than just the balance sheet. Consider the benefits realized in other areas of the community.
- ◊ Offer programming that is specifically for women or specific cultural groups to support their comfort and cultural requirements.
- ◊ Ensure programmers, leaders, coaches and staff set an example, encourage appropriate behaviour and use inclusive language.
- ◊ Encourage and support sensitive but vocal denouncing of racist, homophobic, sexist, ageist, ablebodyist language and stereotypical assumptions within in the organization and with the public (parents, spectators, other participants).
- ◊ Ensure that team 'initiations' are inclusive, team building, and positive.
- ◊ Encourage players to take ownership and be accountable for creating a positive inclusive environment.
- ◊ Ensure uniforms and dress codes respect an individual's gender identity and gender expression and reflect the technical requirements of the sport without any unjustifiable differences.
- ◊ Integrate sport initiatives to allow participants with and without disabilities to learn about one another in ways that might minimize social exclusion, ensuring children and youth with disabilities are always included in regular classes and providing adequate opportunities for them to participate in extracurricular activities with students without disabilities, if desired.



Examples of the inclusion spectrum

- ◊ No modifications: an athlete with an intellectual disability may train and compete with athletes without intellectual disability at a local swimming club
- ◊ Minor modifications: a vision impaired tenpin bowler using a rail for support
- ◊ Major modifications: a seated shot-putter competing under separate rules using modified equipment against other athletes with disability in an integrated track and field competition
- ◊ Primarily for people with disability: athletes with disability and their able-bodied peers combine to form teams for the purpose of developing a wheelchair basketball competition
- ◊ Only for people with disability: goalball players participating in a competition exclusively for people with vision impairments
- ◊ Non-playing role: people with disability can be officials, coaches, club presidents, volunteers and spectators.

Engagement & Meaning

Ensure a Welcoming Engaging Environment

- ◊ Establish and maintain positive and supportive relationships with participants.
- ◊ Encourage skill building, emphasise effort and trying a new skill over winning and encourage learning from mistakes while staying positive. Set goals that are focused on personal improvement in the sport.
- ◊ Place greater value on social participation and acceptance rather than competition and skill.

Encourage Support Networks

- ◊ Provide intergenerational and family-oriented programs. Create programs beyond parent-and-me introductions for young children and welcome families and participants of all ages and abilities to participate together.
- ◊ Encourage family members to get involved on committees (e.g., fundraising) or in sport-related roles (e.g. coaches, referees) and attending sport events as spectators or volunteers.
- ◊ Provide engaging orientation sessions to help families understand the sport to support their loved one's sport participation and help them navigate the system.

Promote Role Models

- ◊ Identify and promote community champions and local heroes that people can relate to, to create a sense of community ownership.
- ◊ Use a variety of role models with whom various participants can identify for a better connection with a diverse audience.
- ◊ Provide training for role models and spokespeople to be sure their stories encourage more participation.
- ◊ Engage females as positive role models to legitimize sport as a safe, female-appropriate cultural activity.

Support Representation

- ◊ Ensure diversity in leadership, coaching staff, officials and other staff through recruitment, hiring, training and mentoring practices.
- ◊ Implement policies to have a minimum of 40% of each gender on executive boards and committees of sport governing bodies along with minimum representation levels of other participant identities.

- ◊ Educate organizations and communities to view diversity as an asset in the selection of coaches for representative teams, professional positions and related roles.
- ◊ Specifically ask girls and women to participate in a sport opportunity, to take a training course, serve on a Board or become a coach.
- ◊ Develop Indigenous apprentice coaches and build coaching capacity within communities and for all sports of interest, including traditional games.

Promote Effectively

- ◊ Create a buzz and get all Canadians excited about sport participation by identifying the most potent messages, including benefits, opportunities to have fun, to meet new people, to spend time with family, camaraderie, family togetherness, self-actualization, that will resonate with target audiences.
- ◊ Tailor messages to fit different priorities, interests and backgrounds of target groups and individuals.
- ◊ Ensure information is easily accessible by using plain language and made available in different formats and languages.
- ◊ Identify and use preferred channels of communication (e.g., word of mouth, peers, phone, email, text, social media, face-to-face, flyers or brochures).
- ◊ Use promotional language and images that are attractive to a diversity of participants. Illustrate promotional materials with pictures of members of the target community participating in the promoted sports. Use statistics that relate to the target group.
- ◊ Use gender-neutral, non-sexist language and images.
- ◊ Identify coaches or athletes that are fluent in certain languages to assist in spreading the word about the program and advocating about opportunities for participation.



Share Information

- ◊ Recruit and train members of diverse groups to provide outreach and share teaching, coaching and other forms of expertise.
- ◊ Provide information on how people can join in non-player roles such as coaches referees or facilitators as well as athletes.
- ◊ Share information on available programs, how to get involved, how to register, available subsidies, locations, accessible programs, free and low cost opportunities and equipment exchange or rebate programs.
- ◊ Develop and promote an online portal and associated app that distributes relevant information.
- ◊ Create registers or databases of women in professional or volunteer management in sport at the local, regional, and national levels so that female candidates are made visible for further recruitment. Consider extending this action to other groups, where it is equally applicable.

Inspire Positive Media Coverage

- ◊ Examine media strategies to ensure they address inclusivity, counter negative stereotypes, promote positive role models and showcase diversity in participation.
- ◊ Promote good news and success stories about topics such as community involvement, creating leaders, a successful athlete from the target group or refugee participation.
- ◊ Provide photo opportunities with members of target communities.
- ◊ Encourage media coverage of elite level sports where members of underrepresented groups are participating (e.g., Paralympics, Special Olympics, National Aboriginal and Indigenous Games, Canadian Women's Hockey League) and non-mainstream sports (e.g., Cricket, Futsal).
- ◊ Increase coverage of women's elite events to normalize women playing sport. Tell stories of real women who play sport using images that challenge existing idealised and stylised images of women.

Good Governance

Examine and Implement Supportive Policies

- ◊ Develop new and examine existing policies, guidelines, position statements, action plans and codes of conduct to address inclusivity, behaviour expectations, ensure equitable access and ensure a positive sport experience for all participants.
- ◊ Allow people to participate in sports consistent with their gender identity.
- ◊ Ensure all participants have fair and equal playing time, regardless of skills, attendance or other factors where appropriate.
- ◊ Implement equitable rules for female and male sports (e.g., distances, duration, depth of field, prize money, etc.).

Gather & Share Good Practice

- ◊ Investigate the rate structure, subsidy and access practices of other organizations.
- ◊ Identify programs and policy actions that are working and share them broadly.
- ◊ Support mechanisms for knowledge mobilization such as Communities of Practice, tools and resources.

Train Leaders

- ◊ Implement True Sport and Respect in Sport training.
- ◊ Support professional development and mentorship opportunities for staff, coaches, officials, educators, and volunteers from underrepresented groups.
- ◊ Provide sensitivity and cultural competency and Indigenous cultural safety training to all staff, administrators and volunteers.
- ◊ Educate program delivery people in specific skills such as the needs of older adults; ways to support parents to demonstrate physical literacy skills and demonstrate sports to their children with disabilities; coaching female athletes; and ways to accommodate and adapt programming.

Evaluation and Monitoring

- ◊ Ask current and past members, community partners and other stakeholders whether or not they feel valued, safe and welcome and what actions make them feel this way.
- ◊ Create mechanisms that solicit regularly scheduled feedback on policy and programs from the general public and from targeted groups.
- ◊ Host meetings with families and participants to get feedback on how to improve the promotion and understanding of your resources, programming and inclusion efforts and adjust as needed.

Helpful Resources

[**"Sport for Life for all newcomers to Canada: Creating Inclusion of Newcomers in Sport and Physical Activity"**](#)

[**CAAWS Gender Equity Playbook**](#)

[**No Accidental Champions: LTAD for Athletes with a Disability**](#)

[**Responsible Coaching Movement**](#)

[**KidSport Canada**](#)

[**Jumpstart**](#)

[**ICC's Playing Together info**](#)



This document is a supplement to the *Policy and program considerations for increasing sport participation among members of under-represented groups in Canada* (available at www.sirc.ca) report that provides the results of a literature review conducted to investigate the topic. This resource provides ideas from the literature that sport practitioners, recreation providers, policy makers and other sector stakeholders could consider using to create a more welcoming and inclusive sport environment for women and girls, Indigenous Peoples, persons with a disability, recent immigrants, new Canadians, socio-economically disadvantaged Canadians, older adults, members of the LGBTQ2IA+ community, Canadians living in rural, remote and isolated regions, members of other groups and all Canadians who feel left out.

For More Information Contact:

Joanne Kay, Sport Canada: joanne.kay@canada.ca

Sue Cragg Consulting: suecraggconsulting@gmail.com