

# Increasing Sport Participation Among Members of Underrepresented Groups:

## Evidence-based Ideas for Local Sport Organizations, Coaches, Leaders and Teachers

### 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 Sport Organizations, 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 local sport organizations, coaches, leaders and teachers who work directly with sport participants. 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 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 participants of all ages, ability levels and backgrounds.
- ◇ Establish age and skill level tiered divisions which can help familiarize new participants to sport, ensuring proper facilitation of skill development to provide a quality physical literacy experience.
- ◇ Encourage participants to try new tasks, movement skills and sports and recognize how acquisition of new skills in one area creates confidence to keep trying.

## Promote Positive Early Experiences

- ◇ Create opportunities that instill feelings of both success and challenge.
- ◇ Integrate [Sport for Life](#) principles into policies, procedures and programs.
- ◇ Host clinics or workshops, preferably free-of-charge, that allow potential participants to try-out or learn about a sport. Have experts on hand to advise on skills and ways to adapt sports for different abilities, comfort with contact, level of exertion and other needs. Offer female-only sport opportunities to showcase new sports in a safe and supportive environment.
- ◇ Integrate sport into other social or community programs, such as after-school programs, cultural programming, library programs, art gallery and museum events, community festivals, etc.
- ◇ 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 that are open to all and use different skills and abilities. Offer non-mainstream sports, including those that may be familiar to or appeal to newcomers, Indigenous people, women, or people with disabilities.
- ◇ Offer a range of levels from introduction and basic skills to intramural and house leagues, to more competitive to elite.
- ◇ Ensure programming offers variety, including sports of interest to girls, those that use different skills and, those from Indigenous and other cultures.
- ◇ Offer programming that is specifically for women or specific cultural groups to support their comfort and cultural requirements.
- ◇ Ensure there are opportunities for the level of challenge desired and consistent with abilities, skills and reasons for participating.
- ◇ In schools, support both intramural and interscholastic teams, irrespective of skill levels, to ensure that all students can participate.
- ◇ Provide traditional Indigenous games that are open to non-Indigenous Canadians provide an opportunity for cross cultural understanding.
- ◇ Provide opportunities for integration so that children without disabilities learn that everyone is capable of physical activity. Adapted sports can allow friends without disabilities to play and compete with those who play an adapted sport such as sitting volleyball, sledge hockey or wheelchair basketball.
- ◇ Provide sport experiences that are more collective, inclusive and supportive to appeal to women.
- ◇ Develop size categories, such as in wrestling, rather than gender or age categories in activities where the size of competitors is a concern.



# Autonomy, Mastery & Challenge

## Adapt and Modify

- ◇ Provide people with disabilities choice in their level of integration and inclusion.
- ◇ Provide appropriate, adapted programming, facilities, activities, equipment or rules to accommodate different skill levels and the choices and unique needs of participants (e.g., rules, net height, size of field of play, level of assistance) so that everyone is able to participate.
- ◇ Ensure equipment meets the needs of all participants, is properly fitted and modified to accommodate skill levels and development and is well maintained and regularly upgraded.
- ◇ Design and promote appropriate training and development models for persons with disabilities that can readily be implemented by athletes, coaches and volunteers.

## Address Cost Barriers

- ◇ Ensure access to financial supports for all those who wish to participate.
- ◇ Implement respectful and dignified application processes for subsidies and ensure that assistance provides long-term support. For example, include equipment as part of the program; provide swipe cards that are generic to full registration and subsidized participants; allow for activity buddies, care aides,

assistants or companions to enter a facility or program free of charge; and, offer discounts for families, seniors, and students, and pay what you can payment structures.

- ◇ Work with Jumpstart, KidSport, local, provincial/territorial, and federal governments, sport bodies and local businesses to help fund the costs of participation.
- ◇ Share subsidy information with all families when they register and through all promotional materials to minimize the stigma of asking.
- ◇ Explore and encourage private and not for profit investment or grants for equipment and programming and connect families with that assistance.
- ◇ Allow payment by instalments rather than requiring full payment up front.
- ◇ Host fundraising events.
- ◇ Pool resources across community organisations and establish equipment and uniform exchange or lending programmes.
- ◇ Provide arenas with sledge hockey equipment or community centers with wheelchairs designed for basketball to enable able bodied peers to play with their wheelchair using friends.



# Autonomy, Mastery & Challenge

## Address Time Constraints

- ◇ Provide opportunities with flexible timing.
- ◇ Provide casual drop-in or pick-up sport opportunities.
- ◇ Offer activities through a child's school.
- ◇ Offer care services or programming for other family members at the same time to support those with care giving responsibilities.
- ◇ If care services not readily available, look at having a rotation of participants serving as the caregivers to take care of dependents on-site.

## Ensure Physical Accessibility

- ◇ Ensure that facilities are safe, accessible and inviting, thereby providing a place where participants want to be and feel welcome.
- ◇ Ensure privacy options, such as closed or curtained bathrooms, changing spaces and showers, times or sections for older adults, and access to gender-neutral spaces (e.g., family bathroom).
- ◇ Ensure signage is appropriate for people with a vision impairment.
- ◇ Provide accessible parking and well-lit parking lots.
- ◇ Ensure buildings are equipped with ramps and/or elevators.

## Ensure Nearby Opportunities

- ◇ Encourage and support community use of schools and use of non-conventional facilities such as basements of places of worship, community halls and other public spaces where there are no multi-purpose recreation centres or arenas, such as in rural or remote settings and areas of socio-economic need.
- ◇ Create local outdoor rinks and equip local parks with soccer fields, tennis courts, baseball diamonds and other facilities that meet the expressed desires of the local community.

## Provide Transportation

- ◇ Consider the cost of transportation as part of the program budgeting.
- ◇ Explore and encourage private and not for profit investment in transportation. For example, work with local businesses and community organizations to arrange for rented or donated busses or volunteer drivers.
- ◇ Locate opportunities near public transit stops. Provide bus route information.
- ◇ Subsidize transit fares or provide tickets.
- ◇ Provide transportation (e.g., late bussing) to students who want to participate in after school intramural or interschool sports opportunities.
- ◇ Work with other organizations to combine transportation to another community event with transportation to a sporting opportunity.
- ◇ Provide transportation to family members and other supporters who will encourage participation.

## Support Registration

- ◇ Provide simple registration and permission forms.
- ◇ Provide alternate registration processes to those available online.
- ◇ Employ an access coordinator or offer support via a community liaison or multilingual outreach person to improve access to recreation information and to help navigate subsidy application and program registration processes.



# 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 to their views incorporated into program and policy planning and that programs meet the needs of potential as well as current participants.
- ◇ Create a safe space for committee members to contribute and share their knowledge, skills, desires and beliefs and to co-create program offerings that would be interesting, fun and meaningful to their community.
- ◇ Avoid a top down approach in developing programs from the perspective of knowing recreation and assuming what members of various groups would enjoy or need.
- ◇ Conduct meetings in the language of those involved.
- ◇ Provide new members the opportunity to discuss and address any needs they may have.
- ◇ Learn about culturally relevant sports and how to offer them.
- ◇ Engage community members with promotion and recruitment.
- ◇ Consult with members of underrepresented groups to determine what sport skills and knowledge they can share.

## 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 important 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.
- ◇ Provide women only programs or facility use times that benefit both religious and body image concerns.
- ◇ Offer programs in different languages.
- ◇ 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 (e.g., parents, spectators, other participants).
- ◇ Ensure that team 'initiations' are inclusive, team building, and positive.
- ◇ Post "Positive Space" stickers or posters and the rainbow pride symbol.
- ◇ Enquire about and respect an individual's right to determine their preferred name and gender markers.
- ◇ Allow 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.

# Belongingness

## Adopt an Intersectoral Approach

- ◇ Jointly work with community partners and public health, education, planning, transportation, justice, social services, settlement organizations, language programs, daycares, libraries and others to create a broader more holistic approach to participation in sport, promote it as part of a healthy lifestyle, and include it as part of broader programming.
- ◇ 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.
- ◇ Integrate sport into other social or community programs, such as after-school programs, cultural programming, library programs, art gallery and museum events, and community festivals.
- ◇ Collaborate with special educators and health care professionals to identify adaptation needs and delivery strategies for people with disabilities.
- ◇ Work with partners to prevent and appropriately respond to sport injuries and concussions, eating disorders, substance abuse, doping, bullying harassment and aggressive parents.

## Celebrate & Promote Diversity

- ◇ 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 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.
- ◇ Provide opportunities for newcomers to teach their neighbours new games, sports, skills and activities. Offering such sports to new Canadians provides familiarity while providing long-term Canadians an opportunity to try a sport that connects them with their own or another ethnic or cultural background.

## 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 high-performance systems.
- ◇ Listen to appreciate cultural, ability and gender appropriate understanding of sport and participation.

## 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.

# Engagement & Meaning

## Ensuring 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.
- ◇ Consider structuring sport around or with a social opportunity such as cultural events, pot-lucks, leadership training, literacy or second language training. Consider offering food as part of a social or cultural experience to build upon the sporting activity.
- ◇ Rotate the lines so that everyone has equal playing time.
- ◇ Ensure that opportunities are fun, interesting and social.
- ◇ Consider following up with dropouts and ensure they are feeling welcome to return. Ask about barriers and address them as appropriate.
- ◇ Invite interpreters to attend practices, games, and programs, to help build trust and relationships between newcomer participants and the leaders.
- ◇ Encourage unity and an inclusive identity within teams to discourage cliques.

## Encouraging Support Networks & Social Interaction

- ◇ Encourage registration with a friend.
- ◇ Provide volunteer assistants for people with physical or intellectual disabilities.
- ◇ Consider engaging high school students who hope to volunteer, who require coop placements or are undertaking practicums or other course credit endeavours, to support participation, teach skills and mentor participants.
- ◇ 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.

- ◇ Create a buddy system so if someone misses one class/session their buddy follows up to keep them engaged.
- ◇ 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.
- ◇ Provide a venue for community members (including Indigenous Elders) to observe, support and interact with participants.

## Promote Role Models & Peer Support

- ◇ Identify and promote community champions and local heroes that people can relate to create a sense of community ownership.
- ◇ Promote a variety of role models with whom participants can identify and for a better connection with a diverse audience.
- ◇ Engage females as positive role models to legitimize sport as a safe, female-appropriate cultural activity.
- ◇ Provide training for role models and spokespeople to be sure their stories encourage more participation.
- ◇ Encourage more highly skilled participants to coach and mentor those who do not have the same level of skill and to help demonstrate skills. For example, provide opportunities for able-bodied children to learn from children with exceptionalities who have mastered a particular skill.
- ◇ Pair individuals with intellectual disabilities with partners without intellectual disabilities on teams for training and competition in schools and elsewhere.
- ◇ Pair participants with similar abilities and goals.



# Engagement & Meaning

## Support Representation

- ◇ Ensure diversity in leadership, coaching staff, officials and other staff through recruitment, hiring and 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.
- ◇ 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.
- ◇ Educate organizations and communities to view diversity as an asset in the selection of coaches for representative teams, professional positions and related roles.

## Promote Effectively

- ◇ Create a buzz and get all Canadians excited about sport participation by identifying the most potent messages, that will resonate with the target communities, including benefits, opportunities to have fun, to meet new people, to spend time with family, camaraderie, family togetherness and self-actualization.
- ◇ Tailor messages to fit different priorities, interests and backgrounds of target groups and individuals.
- ◇ Ensure information is easily accessible by using plain language and making it 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.
- ◇ Recruit and train community members to provide outreach and share teaching, coaching and other forms of expertise.

## Share Information

- ◇ Share information on available programs, how to get involved, how to register, available subsidies, and equipment exchange or rebate programs.
- ◇ Provide information on how people can join in non-player roles such as coaches, referees or facilitators as well as athletes.
- ◇ Develop and promote an online portal and associated app that distributes information about programs, locations and sessions, including accessible opportunities and free and low-cost opportunities.
- ◇ Distribute payment and subsidy information through the internet and community publications.

## 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.
- ◇ Generate media coverage, host events and create public awareness of programming that targets members of underrepresented groups.
- ◇ Provide photo opportunities with members of the target communities participating in the promoted sports.



# Good Governance

## Examine and Implement Supportive Policies

- ◇ Develop new and examine existing policies, guidelines, position statements, action plans and codes of conduct to promote inclusivity and behaviour expectations and ensure equitable access and 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.
- ◇ Implement equitable rules for female and male sports (e.g., distances, duration, depth of field, prize money, etc.).

## Gather & Share Good Practice

- ◇ Share successes with your organization's management.
- ◇ Join Communities of Practice and seek out educational and training opportunities.

## 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 sports to their children with disabilities; coaching female athletes; and ways to accommodate and adapt programming.

## Evaluate and Monitor

- ◇ 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](http://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.

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