

Capacity Building in Recreation

Reflection Report

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To strengthen the human capital of the recreation sector, it is imperative that recreation and parks practitioners are equipped with the skills and knowledge to be active and relevant leaders within their field. The provision of quality recreational services to citizens is correlated to level of experience and knowledge of the providers offering these opportunities. This concept is supported by Zimmermann and Tower (2017, p. 2), who believe that “if leisure managers do their jobs effectively, then the communities around the globe will have better opportunities to increase their quality of life”.

The following discussion will define and review the importance of capacity building and will identify current best practices that are being offered at provincial and territorial levels within Canada, with a focus on the provision of support by the Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association (SPRA).

Definition of Capacity Building

The explanation of capacity building has been well defined by the not-for-profit sector, and this easily transfers into municipal recreation, and to the not-for-profit recreation agencies that support local and provincial recreation administration.

The United Way of Calgary and Area (2011) has shared a meaning of capacity building, derived from the United Nations, that is relevant to this discussion, “...the process by which individuals, groups, organizations and communities increase their abilities to: (1) perform core functions, solve problems, define and achieve objectives; and (2) understand and deal with their development needs in a broad context and in a sustainable manner” (p. 4). It is vitally important that the people working and volunteering in recreation are developing their skills in proactive ways, and their organizations and municipalities must support this movement.

An alternative term to capacity building is leisure management, which has been specified by Zimmermann and Tower (p. 2-3) as managing and establishing a variety of organizational concepts, including leadership, finance, community planning, and measuring outcomes.

Within Saskatchewan, the recreation sector is led by a variety of sources, including local volunteer recreation boards, municipal employees, and not-for-profit agencies such as the Sport, Culture and Recreation Districts and the Provincial Recreation Associations. It is the human capital of these groups who are requesting support and services to enhance their human and organizational strategic development.

The Importance of Capacity Building

There is currently a shift in the sector that may impact the level of effectiveness specific to recreation delivery. With a large number of current recreation practitioners preparing for

retirement, there is a need to ensure that up-and-coming leaders are equipped to take on new roles and responsibilities within their work (Alberta Recreation and Parks Association, n.d.). The challenge, as identified by the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA), is that the post-secondary training provided to new practitioners has not kept pace with the changes in the sector, and that the new guard of employees is not adequately prepared for their future roles, which includes a more facilitated delivery process to enhance community development (n.d).

There is an inferred gap within Saskatchewan’s recreation employment base. There is a cross section of practitioners nearing retirement and a healthy influx of new practitioners, but upon review of the evaluation reports from SPRA’s Annual Conferences, it may be assumed that practitioners at the mid-point of their employment are low in numbers. In 2016b (SPRA, p. 3), 62% of the attendees identified that they have worked in the parks and recreation sector for 10 or fewer years, with 23% specifying they have been in the sector for more than 20 years, leaving just 15% who have been in the sector between 11 and 20 years. Table 1 offers a breakdown of SPRA delegates who indicated how long they have worked/volunteered in the recreation sector, from years 2013 to 2016.

Table 1: SPRA Conference Delegates, Years in Sector

Year of Conference	% in sector 1-10 years	% in sector 11-20 years	% in sector more than 20 years
SPRA, 2016b, p. 3	62%	15%	23%
SPRA, 2015, p. 1	49%	29%	22%
SPRA, 2014, p. 1	56%	20%	24%
SPRA, 2013, p. 1	63%	13%	24%

These types of statistics leave questions unanswered, specifically, where have the mid-range practitioners gone? Have they left the sector for other employment, were they ever there or are they just less engaged in the educational offerings provided through the Conference? Further research into these statistics and theories is recommended, at provincial and national levels.

This suggested shift in active practitioners in the sector is an important note that organizations like SPRA need to keep track of. With limited mid-level practitioners available to mentor the field, SPRA needs to offer and support professional development to the “rookies” within the sector.

ARPA (n.d.) is a strong advocate in identifying that there has been an adaptation in the work of recreation practitioners, and that leaders are turning to more of a facilitator/builder role to motivate citizens to be champions of their own quality of life (p. 2). The idea of collective impact encourages a broad base of sectors and individuals to work together to increase the overall health of a community. Herchmer (2011) agrees with this ideal, and specifics that practitioners whom are actively taking on a community builder role “are enhancing organizational capacity building, supporting the development of leaders, providing opportunities for training and learning, facilitating, coaching, and mentoring” (p. 5).

Identification of Needed Capacity Building Tools

In terms of what tools and trainings are required, this varies from province to province, which is identifiable in the upcoming sections. The not-for-profit sector has offered a high level of leadership and innovation specific to capacity development for organizations and individuals. This knowledge

and information sharing transfers well into municipal recreation, because the common goals of the sectors are similar – as all desire to engage citizens in creating positive and healthy communities.

Both the United Way of Calgary and Area (2011, p. 6-7) and PricewaterhouseCoopers Canada Foundation (2011, p. 12) have specified a variety of elements that need to be supported and fostered to help organizations to be truly effective. These high level ideals are very often seen within the recreation sector as core competencies for practitioners and the agencies they work for. These elements include:

- **Leadership Capacity:** the necessity to have influential internal leadership, strong governance and sustainability;
- **Management Capacity:** the essential need for positive human resource management, and to be fiscally responsible;
- **Technical Capacity:** the delivery mechanism, or programming, for recreation must be fostered, and supported by skills in fundraising, marketing and technological advances; and,
- **Adaptive Capacity:** the ability to adapt to environmental, programming and organizational changes.

These elements can easily be seen in the topics of delivery that are identified in the following two sections.

The Temperature in Saskatchewan

SPRA completed an evaluative review of the impact of the 2014-2019 Strategic Plan at the mid-point of implementation. Within this review, SPRA members were asked how they rate SPRA's level of overall success in achieving Long Term Outcome 2, and it's associated Intermediate Outcomes (SPRA, 2016a, p. 14). Long Term Outcome 2 is specific to ensuring that the recreation sector in Saskatchewan is served by informed and highly competent volunteers and professionals (SPRA, 2016a, p. 13). The Likert Rating for SPRA success in this area was 3.86, or a strong rating (p. 14). SPRA members noted that some of SPRA's key successes in delivering on this outcome include the quality of programs and training providing, the further developing of training for the sector, and that the networking opportunities offered by the organization are helping to build capacity within communities (p. 14).

Through the Mid-Term evaluation (SPRA, 2016a), SPRA members commented on their definition of what competency means, and the most popular remarks included that staff and volunteers are knowledgeable, have the ability to do their job, share knowledge, are involved in lifelong learning, and are experienced, educated and willing (p. 15).

With this feedback from members, SPRA is well positioned to support ongoing efforts to offer ongoing learning's for professionals and volunteers. Some of the services that SPRA currently offers includes: Pool and Arena Operator, Parks Maintenance, HIGH FIVE®, Recreation Board Development and First Nation Recreation Board Development (SPRA, 2017b). Recently, SPRA members requested additional support specific to Human Resource Development. With this information, SPRA was able to contract an HR Consulting group to offer HR Boot Camp™ (SPRA, 2017a) workshops in the spring of 2017. Registration for these sessions has been highly sought after.

Other successful workshops suggested by the members that SPRA has offered have included Fundraising Workshops and Recreation Board Development workshops. The seven SPRA Field Consultants, who provide consultation and support to recreation providers within specific geographical areas, are serving as supports in the Recreation Board Development process. Each have been trained in leading this process, and ensure that the development of new, and renewal of old recreation boards, happens successfully.

Each year, SPRA requests feedback from their conference delegates on session topics they would like to see in the future. In 2016, some key points that came through included the need for practical training around human resource management, volunteer recruitment, facility risk management, how to run effective meetings, conflict resolution, grant writing support or creating successful collaborations (SPRA, 2016, p. 12). In addition, the value added of providing certifications at the Conference, such as during a pre-conference event was greatly successful.

In 2015 (SPRA, p. 4-5) received feedback in the form of common themes from the delegates. Future suggested sessions were based around the themes of corporate and customer service, best practice sharing, motivational concepts, budgeting and fundraising support, programming support, physical literacy, as well as inclusion and diversity.

It's interesting to note that even over the course of a year, the suggestions from the membership adapted from more programming and educational based requests in 2015 to more competency and personal/professional development support in 2016.

The Temperature across Canada

The Framework for Recreation in Canada: Pathways to Wellbeing (Canadian Parks and Recreation Association/Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council, 2015, p. 28) has identified Recreation Capacity as a primary goal to support the Canadian recreation sector as it moves into the future. Direction has been set through this Framework, and the expectation is that competency-based training and developments programs are to be provided to professionals and volunteers (p. 29).

The Provincial and Territorial Parks and Recreation Associations (P/T Associations) all have roles to play in the delivery of education and training supportive of their members and other recreation stakeholders. Table 2 identifies key opportunities that selected P/T Associations are actively offering, in addition to flagship trainings and education such as annual conferences, HIGH FIVE®, arena operators and pool operators.

Table 2: P/T Association Trainings and Education

P/T Association	Training and Education Provided
British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-Learning Webpage • Risk Management Courses • Leisure Development Course • Strategies for Challenging Behaviours • Women in Leadership Program
Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead on the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association Professional Development Certification

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Centre Webinars
Parks and Recreation Ontario (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks and Recreation Management Certificate Program
Recreation Nova Scotia (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreation Practitioners Training Institute • Board of Directors Video Training Series
Recreation Newfoundland and Labrador (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Volunteer Recreation Leader Training Program • Recreation Management Professional Certificate Program
Recreation New Brunswick (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing Your Sponsorship Potential
Recreation and Parks Association of the Yukon (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders Training
Northwest Territories Recreation and Parks Association (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Leaders Retreat and Certificate

Opportunities, such as what are listed above, are all relevant and needed within the sector. Each jurisdiction requires different training, based on the needs of their users. The functionality of this type of implementation appears to be successful across the nation.

Challenges that Impede Capacity Building for Individuals

Often there are challenges that impede the success and implementation of capacity building for individuals and organizations. This may be due to lack of planning, limited human resources and financial capacity, and a lack of willingness to commit to a process (Millar and Doherty, n.d, p. 6). Within Saskatchewan, recent budget reductions to communities have town councils making difficult budgetary decisions, and spending on actions such as professional development, is an initial cut within programming budgets. This puts additional pressure on organizations, such as SPRA, who are prioritizing the provision of education and training. Especially when times are difficult, it is important to continue to offer supports to members and practitioners, but SPRA may need to consider subsidizing costs, offering bursaries and grants, or determining more cost effective processes for implementation, such as webinars.

Herchmer (2011) believes that it is imperative that communities, and recreation organizations, get better and stronger when their leaders also become strong and more effective in their roles (p. 15). Investing in leadership at a community and organization level not only inspires and supports leaders, but it encourages and retains employees as well. Leaders must also be ready, willing and able to commit to continuous professional development (p. 16), which will support a positive environment and opportunities for proactive change within their job.

Conclusion

The work of recreation is not stagnant. The continual challenges and changes faced by the sector suggest a constant state of flux and need for adaptability. Due to this, there will always be a need for capacity building tools, but what these tools are will adapt with each cycle and phase. Agencies such as SPRA need to be proactive in the development of tools and education that continues to ensure that recreation practitioners are equipped for the future and will continue to enhance the quality of life of all citizens.

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