

A Planning Guide for the Development of Rural and Remote Fitness Facilities

Manitoba Healthy Living
Recreation and Regional Services

Introduction

Rural and remote communities of all sizes in Manitoba are joining a growing trend by establishing community operated fitness centres. These fitness centres vary in size and function but serve an important need in the community.

As most of these communities could not support a for-profit fitness centre operation many are being developed and operated by public, not-for-profit or non-profit agencies/organizations. Cooperatives (Community Co-ops) have become a popular organizational model to use in establishing a facility in locations that could not support a private venture. (For more information on the establishment of a community cooperative contact your local office of Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives – Growing Opportunities Branch.)

This planning guide will assist communities considering the establishment of a fitness centre by providing lists and tips for organizing committees to consider as they move towards determining whether or not they can support a facility.

The following checklist can help you take an intelligent and systematic look at your opportunities for success in developing a community fitness centre. In addition, the information source section offers sound information which can be used to further evaluate the proposed fitness centre development.

Getting Started

1. **Connect to the community – Developing the concept/vision of what you want to build**

Community consultation/involvement is an important factor to consider in planning a fitness facility. Consider the following community stakeholders in discussions regarding fitness facility development:

- Municipal government (elected and administration staff)
- Recreation commission/department (volunteer board members and/or recreation professionals)
- Regional Health Authority (community health workers)
- Recreation, sport and senior groups/organizations
- Service Clubs
- Chamber of Commerce/Community Economic Development Committee
- Youth organizations

2. Establish a committee

Once it's been determined that proceeding with fitness facility planning is warranted a committee should be established to assist with the process. A number of steps are involved in bringing the right people together:

- Is there a group of like-minded people (supportive of the idea of establishing a centre) organized to work together? If not, consider the following members:
 - Recreation Director or Recreation Commission/Committee member(s)
 - Community Health department representative (nurse, resource worker)
 - Community (Band, Municipal councilor) representative
 - School representative (Teacher, administrator)
 - Other organization representatives (service clubs, CDPI committee, healthy community committee, *in motion* committee)
 - Interested community members (physical activity enthusiasts, fitness leaders, community elders)

3. Prepare a Needs Assessment/Analysis

Before getting too far into the planning process it is important to gauge the interest and need for a fitness centre in your community. There are a number of steps involved in this process, and the first involves reviewing currently available information. Sometimes referred to as an environmental scan, this information gathering process sets the stage for future planning activities. Start this process by reviewing information from the following sources:

- Community round-table information
- Economic development strategy
- Engineering reports (related to existing buildings and their use)
- Survey of existing buildings in community
- Community recreation plan (strategic or master plan)
- School division planning
- Regional Health Authority documents (community service plan)

4. Complete a Feasibility Study

Following a review of existing information it is important to determine the feasibility of the project. Conducting a feasibility study is the next step after needs assessment/analysis in the process of creating a facility development plan. A feasibility

study includes the application of cost, revenue and other measurements to the needs analysis to determine the level of development (if any) may be justified from a business planning perspective.

Things to consider when conducting a feasibility study include:

- Determine and identify possible sources of additional information
 - Group the facts and information in an orderly manner
 - Draw a map showing location, competitive and complementary facilities, physical factors of site accessibility, developmental factors, etc.
 - Assign priority to facts according to how they affect the potential feasibility of information vs. opinion and "guesstimates."
 - Talking to other communities who have a fitness facility can be helpful.
- Determine which, if any current trends (public preferences, area development, socio-economics, amalgamations, etc...) may have a significant bearing on your facility. Then, you can decide which alternative(s) are feasible and worthy of detailed study and implementation.
- Assign the responsibility for gathering facts and information to appropriate committee members.
 - Select (if possible and appropriate) local professional sources such as appraisers, architects, site development engineers, and designate specific responsibility.
- Set a timetable for gathering and assembling the information.
- Contact local CHT&S office for additional planning information and assistance.

Developing a user profile - To be successful a facility should establish a profile of the user(s) it wishes to serve. People have different needs because of age, family status, health status, income level, etc. If you attempt to attract all users you are likely to be less successful. At the same time, it is important to recognize that there is a wide area of common interest/need among the overall population.

To develop a user profile for your facility, begin by ranking the most important user characteristics within each of the following categories:

- Age of Clientele
 - senior citizens
 - middle years (age 35-55)
 - post school youth (age 25-35)
 - older youth, teens (age 16-25)
 - younger youth (age 10-16)
- Family Status
 - older (children raised)
 - married, family oriented (children, youth)
 - young married (young children)
 - married (no children)

- older and post school youth (single)
- younger, single youth and children group
- Income
 - High
 - above average
 - middle or average
 - low
- Other Factors
 - Sex
 - Educational levels

This type of analysis will help you determine your facility “components” (the kind of equipment, layout and services you offer should be based on your user profile.) It will also help further evaluate your project according to anticipated activities and the users you wish to attract - and help select the best alternatives as well as answer important questions, like:

- Is this facility realistic in our particular situation?
- Are there any apparent conflicts or contradictions?

Furthermore, it is important to estimate the particular program needs (i.e. strength training, cardiovascular training, flexibility, etc...) of potential participants.

Analyzing a location - Determine what facilities you have available in your community that could become a suitable fitness centre. Use the following list of considerations to explore your options. If considering a phased development rank items to show priority of development.

- Location Factors
 - Is a facility (building, room or part of an existing structure) available?
 - Will it be owned, rented, leased, etc...
 - What type of access can you expect (i.e. anytime, limited during day or evening, weekdays or weekends, etc...)
 - Is access limited by other uses of the space or by other “tenants”
 - Is location a separate structure or combined with another (i.e. attached or connected to other facility)
 - Complementary facilities – are other attractions/amenities in close proximity
 - Does location have ground floor access or does it require climbing stairs (up or down)
 - How much space is available?

- Does facility have a washroom or change-room area?
 - Does the facility have air conditioning?
 - Does facility have adequate power supply? (i.e. for cardiovascular equipment)
 - What type of flooring (concrete, wood, carpet)
 - Can your group make alterations to the facility
- Leasehold improvements – how much work will be required to make improvements

After a review of existing materials, the next step in the planning process is to **develop a functional program** of the proposed facility. A functional program (to be developed in consultation with stakeholders) is best defined as a prioritized listing of potential services and programs. It includes a projection of the size of the services/programs which may be offered in the facility and might include such information as: the number of users, frequency of use, day of week (use) emphasis, time of day emphasis, seasonality of use, etc....

Functional program Considerations:

- A review of trends in the fitness industry (and how these trends may impact the facility being developed)
- Identify local service and program objectives (list)
- Identify community service/program gaps
- Identify community facility gaps
- Developed prioritized program (what needs to be developed first, etc...)

5. Communication

After the first draft of the functional program has been developed it's time to get the rest of the community informed. A communications strategy will assist in informing the public of your plans and in generating positive public perception of the project. A communications campaign should:

- Gauge community support/opposition of project
- Provide regular "news" updates
 - Media announcements
 - Group presentations
 - Community "open-house" events

6. Finalize Functional program

Following the development of the functional program – and after discussions in the community – it will likely be necessary to revise the original program. The revision of the original draft of the functional program should reflect community input and response to the project. An evaluation at this stage of planning should include:

A. Financial analysis

- The development of a business plan (to answer the question of whether the facility be sustainable over the long-term)
- Scale or size review (How much can we afford to build? How much can we afford to operate)
- Sources of funding – including contributions of others to the project
- Future growth and expansion consideration

B. Estimating Resource Requirements

This Section will help you estimate basic requirements necessary for your fitness centre. It is based upon typical requirements of similar community-run facilities. To determine actual costs a more detailed study (business plan) will be necessary.

a. Capital Investment (Estimated Cost Items)

- Utilities
 - Water
 - cost of connecting
 - water faucets and drinking fountains
 - water treatment equipment, softeners
 - showers
 - Electricity
 - Contact MB Hydro for consumption estimates
 - Safety lights
 - Outlets/wiring for cardio equipment (ensuring enough dedicated power to properly operate cardio equipment)
 - Telephone System
 - installation, telephone extensions cost per month
 - is it necessary (emergencies)
 - Heating/Cooling Systems
 - central heating or individual heating/cooling systems
- Site Development/Leasehold improvement Considerations
 - Are renovations required? If so,
 - Access/egress for public use facility (labour code safety and fire regulations)

- grading, drainage, parking, signage
- Weight training/cardio equipment
 - How much, what types, electrical or manual power
 - free weights
 - barbells and dumbbells
 - medicine balls, bands, tubes
 - benches
 - mats
 - Selectorized/cable machines
 - Single stack (one use) or multi-station
 - Cardiovascular equipment
 - Treadmills
 - Bikes
 - Upright
 - Recumbent
 - Elliptical trainers
 - Steppers
 - Rowers
- Building and Furnishing Considerations
 - Equipment storage
 - Change-rooms
 - Separate male/female washroom
 - Lockers
 - Sound system
 - Mirrors
 - Furniture, fixtures
 - stereo
 - lockers
 - mirrors
 - registration desk
- Professional and related services
 - Architectural consultants (design)
 - Legal (Coop incorporation)
- Working Capital (operating money needed until cash flow develops sufficiently to meet direct costs)
 - Utilities prior to opening
 - Labour and supplies (leasehold improvements and/or renovations)
 - equipment purchase (deposits, shipping, set-up and installation fees)

Accurately estimating complete costs of inputs is important. Most developers are overly optimistic during planning and fail to consider all costs.

b. Operating Costs

Ongoing operating costs need to be considered. The following regular expenses should be included in budget preparation:

- land /building
 - monthly lease/mortgage/rent payment
 - insurance (third person liability, property)
 - property taxes (if applicable)

- utilities
 - water
 - electricity
 - telephone
 - security, emergency
 - cable/satellite
 - entertainment

- equipment and machinery maintenance
 - Flooring
 - Mats, rubberized floor

- site maintenance
 - regular cleaning
 - snow removal
 - painting, repairs

- fees and other expenses
 - accounting/annual audit
 - interest to be paid out (borrowed funds)
 - other expenses (miscellaneous, dues, subscriptions, contributions, bad debts)

c. Sources of Funds

- “Owners” equity
 - cooperative membership fees
 - municipal contribution
 - local organizations
 - grants
 - loans
 - notes, bonds, debentures, line of credit, advances



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