

# Every Child Plays

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## Access to Recreation for Low-Income Families in Ontario



## Report of Survey Findings

Prepared by  
David Redmond and Associates

November 2007

Province of Ontario  
Ministry of Health Promotion  
gratefully acknowledged.



# Report of Survey Findings



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# Report of Survey Findings

**This document was prepared for:**

Ontario Task Group on Access to Recreation for Low-Income Families

**This document was prepared by:**

David Redmond and Associates

Funding for the completion of this document was provided by the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion

**Ontario Task Group on Access to Recreation For Low-Income Families****Overview:**

The Ontario Task Group on Access to Recreation for Low-Income Families is comprised of members from a broad representation of provincial, municipal, non-profit, corporate, and advocacy partners. We all share an interest in the healthy development of children, youth, families and communities and are working collaboratively to influence policy development in Ontario to increase access to recreation for low-income children, youth and families.

**Vision:**

Every Child Plays

**Beliefs:**

In Ontario we strongly support the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) that speaks to the rights of children to rest and leisure.

Ontario's children and youth are healthier and more resilient as a result of participating in recreational pursuits.

We believe that innovative approaches should be taken to ensure that every child regardless of financial circumstances experiences play, without barriers, engages in positive and high quality leisure pursuits and enjoys physical, social and emotional health through participation in community recreation.

**Acknowledgements**

The author would like to thank the Ontario Task Group on Access to Recreation for Low-Income Families for their direction and feedback on this project.

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## Highlights of the Survey Findings

- The methodology was an online survey conducted in August and September 2007. The sample includes 145 recreation practitioners with Ontario municipalities. Two (2) large provincial non-profit organizations completed a survey that represented over 51 member service organizations across Ontario.
- Using the 355 municipalities reporting operating costs for recreation programs and facilities for the 2005 Municipal Performance Measures Program as a study population, this represents an overall response rate of 41%. This sample provides a statistically significant and representative cross section of Ontario municipalities.
- 35% of municipalities have a Council-approved and published policy dealing with equity of access to recreation for all residents or have one in development.
- 38% of municipalities with a policy for equity of access to recreation make specific reference in the policy to providing subsidies for persons with an inability to pay.
- 72% of municipalities identified the costs and financial implications as an important barrier to the development and implementation of policy dealing with equity of access to recreation; 41% identified other higher priorities; and 31% identified a lack of knowledge or expertise to develop a policy as an important barrier.
- 77% of municipalities reduce or remove fees for at least some recreation facilities or programs. This includes 91% of municipalities with an equity of access to recreation policy and 70% of those without such a policy.
- A majority of municipalities communicate the availability of fee reductions to the public through recreation program notices and brochures (65%) and on their website (52%). Close to three quarters (72%) rely at least to some extent on word of mouth communications through staff and volunteers.
- Among municipalities that offer fee supports, most reduce or eliminate program fees and related costs for sports programs (68%) and general recreation programs such as fitness and games (54%). For facilities, a majority of municipalities reduce fees for arenas (56%) and sports fields (56%).
- A majority of municipalities identified limited transportation and equipment (62%) and the social stigma associated with asking for financial assistance (52%) as important non-financial barriers that limit the effectiveness of fee supports.
- Municipalities rely on fees for an average of 38% of their operating expenses. Larger municipalities rely more on fees for recreation operating expenses: an average of 47% for those with a population of 250,000 and over.
- The most recent budgets of a majority of municipalities (62%) directed an increase in recreation user fees.

- 36% of municipalities apply fee or rate reductions to specific programs (e.g., sports for youth), 25% apply them to specific target populations (e.g., older adults), and 24% apply them to specific facilities.
- 77% of municipalities reported at least some gaps in their policies for equity of access; 71% reported at least some gaps in their practices.
- Fewer than half of municipalities (48%) are satisfied that their communications about the availability of fee reductions for recreation programs are reaching the intended audiences.

## 1. Survey Objectives and Methodology

### Objectives

The main objective of the Access to Recreation Survey was to develop a quantitative profile of the policies and practices of municipalities regarding access to recreation for low-income children and youth. The survey conducted in 2007 followed an exploratory survey conducted on the same theme in 2006.

### Methodology

The methodology used an online survey designed in conjunction with and hosted by an independent research company. PRO sent a letter of introduction to recreation contacts with all municipalities in Ontario (approximately 445). Based on 2005 data for the Municipal Performance Measures Program (MPMP), this includes 355 municipalities reporting operating costs for recreation programs and facilities combined.

Target recipients of the questionnaires were senior recreation managers who were encouraged either to complete the survey themselves or to delegate completion to the appropriate staff member. Some municipalities were contacted in advance of the survey to identify the appropriate respondents.

The survey was conducted from mid August to near the end of September 2007. PRO sent reminder emails to non-respondents approximately halfway through the survey period. A second and final reminder was sent approximately one week before the end of the survey. Some telephone calls also were made to non-respondents during the final week. The first letter of introduction and subsequent email reminders included a link for recipients to connect easily to the survey.

A modified version of the survey questionnaire was sent to provincial-level representatives of the two (2) non-profit organizations, who each completed a questionnaire on behalf of their member service organizations across Ontario.

The survey questionnaire included approximately 30 close-ended questions dealing with user fee policies and practices in place for facilities and programs, target groups for fee subsidies or other measures, take-up, gaps, partnerships, and communications. Approximately 10 open-ended questions were also included. The questionnaire, annotated with the overall survey statistics, is presented in Appendix A.

### **Sample Characteristics**

The final survey sample includes 145 municipalities. Using the MPMP figure of 355 municipalities reporting operating costs for recreation programs and facilities as the effective population of municipalities for this recreation survey, 145 respondents represents an overall response rate of 41%.

The survey sample provides a statistically significant and representative cross section of Ontario municipalities and provides a basis for profiling municipal policies and practices across the province.

By region of Ontario, the survey sample includes the following distribution of municipalities:

- Northwestern – 7%;
- Northeastern – 18%;
- Central – 16%;
- Eastern – 21%;
- Toronto and area – 12%; and,
- Southwestern – 26%.

By population, the survey sample includes the following distribution of municipalities:

- Under 10,000 – 52%;
- 10,000 to 24,999 – 20%;
- 25,000 to 99,999 – 12%;
- 100,000 to 249,999 – 10%; and,
- 250,000 and over – 6%.

This report presents the results for Ontario municipalities, with some additional comments from the two large service organizations. Where appropriate, comparisons with the exploratory 2006 survey are presented.

## **Definitions of concepts**

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were provided with the following definitions of key concepts to help clarify the terms used throughout the questionnaire.

**Access** – policies, programs and approaches to increase opportunities to participate in recreation programs, facilities and services for children and youth facing barriers to participation.

**Subsidies** – reducing user fees as a means of improving access.

**Grants** – any funding which supports the capacity of municipalities to reduce user fees such as rental fees, registration fees, etc.

**Policy** – a governing set of principles given force and effect by elected officials in order to meet recognized public needs; policy set out what government intends to do and chooses not to do.

**Practice** – an activity that is routinely performed, regardless of whether it is required in policy or specified in procedure; an accepted method of standardized activity.

## 2. Municipal Policies for Improving Access to Recreation

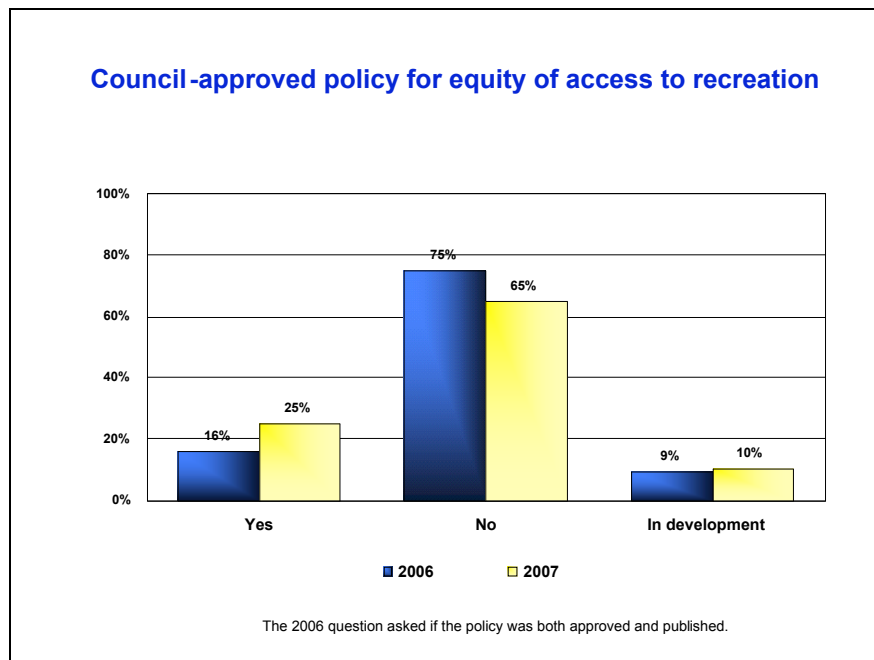
### Council-approved policies

Over one third of municipalities (35%) either have a Council-approved policy dealing with equity of access to recreation for all residents or have one in development: 25% already have such a policy and 10% have one in development. Most municipalities with a policy in development expect it to be in place in the next six months (i.e., by Spring 2008).

The number of municipalities reporting in 2007 that they have a Council-approved policy dealing with equity of access to recreation for all residents policy represents an increase from the 2006 survey, in which a total of 25% of municipalities reported either having a policy or having one in development. It should be noted that some of this increase may be attributable the question used in 2006, which asked if the policy was both Council-approved and published.

Among municipalities that currently have a Council-approved policy, almost two-thirds (63%) publish the policy (e.g., on the municipal website) or otherwise make the policy readily available to the public. Larger municipalities were somewhat more likely to indicate that they publish their policies.

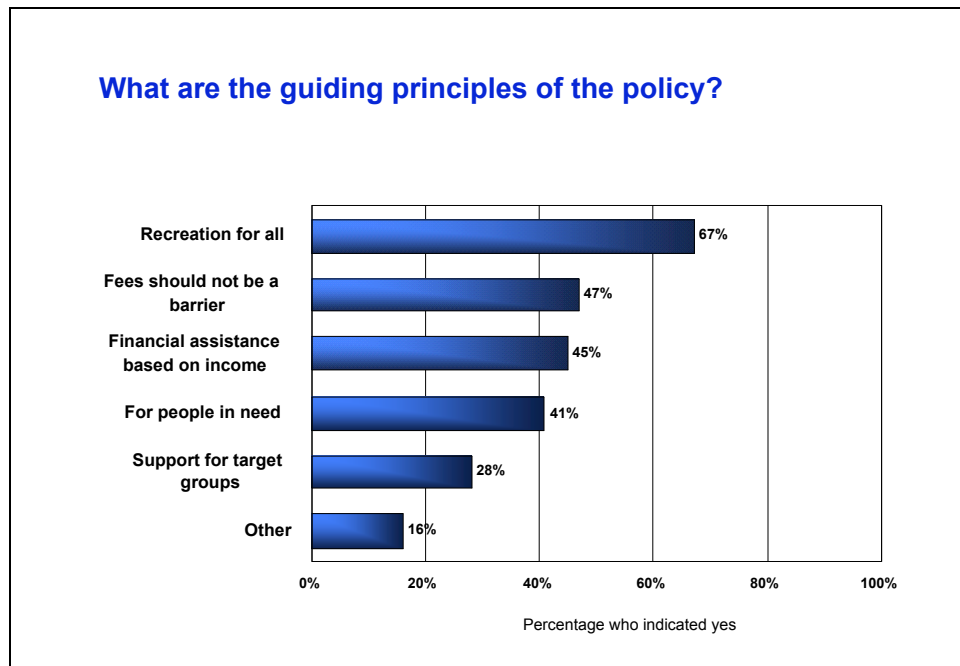
The two (2) non-profit organizations have Board-approved policies dealing with equity of access to recreation. One (1) non-profit organization publishes their policy. The second non-profit organization does not publish their policy, but it is part of their mandate and mission and they consider this to be widely known.



### Guiding principals of access to recreation policies

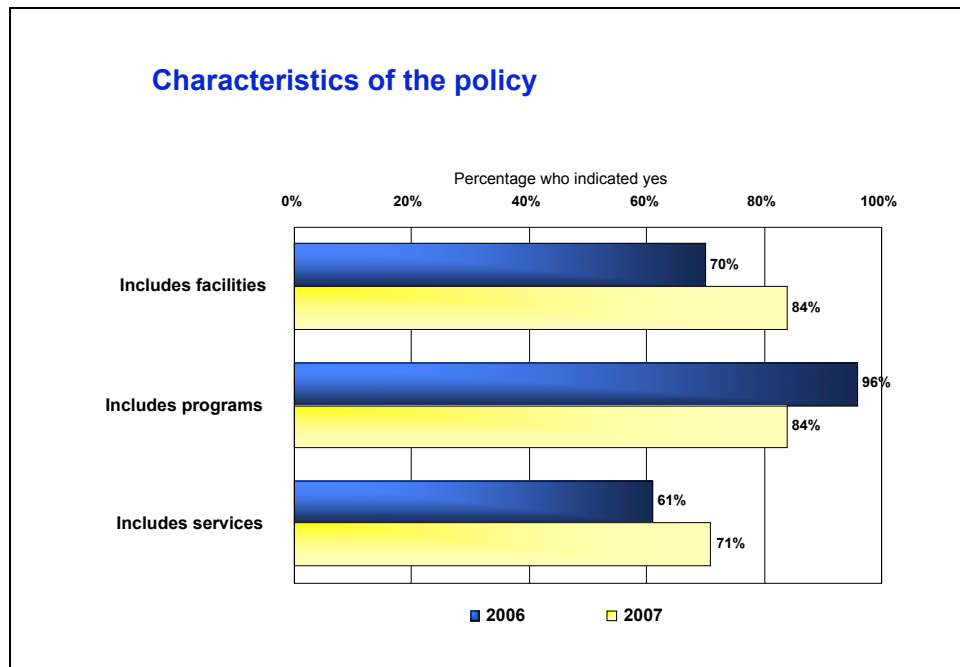
Respondents from municipalities that have equity of access to recreation policies were asked to identify the guiding principles of the policy. “Recreation for all” was mentioned most frequently (67%). Other common guiding principles, indicated by close to half of municipalities, are that fees should not be a barrier (47%) and that financial assistance should be based on income (45%). Although mentioned somewhat less frequently, supporting people in need (41%) and supporting target groups such as children and seniors (28%) also are important guiding principles of equity of access to recreation policies.

Both non-profit organizations indicated that fees should not be a barrier and that financial assistance should be based on income are guiding principles. One (1) non-profit organization also indicated recreation for all as a guiding principle of their policy.



### Scope of municipal policies

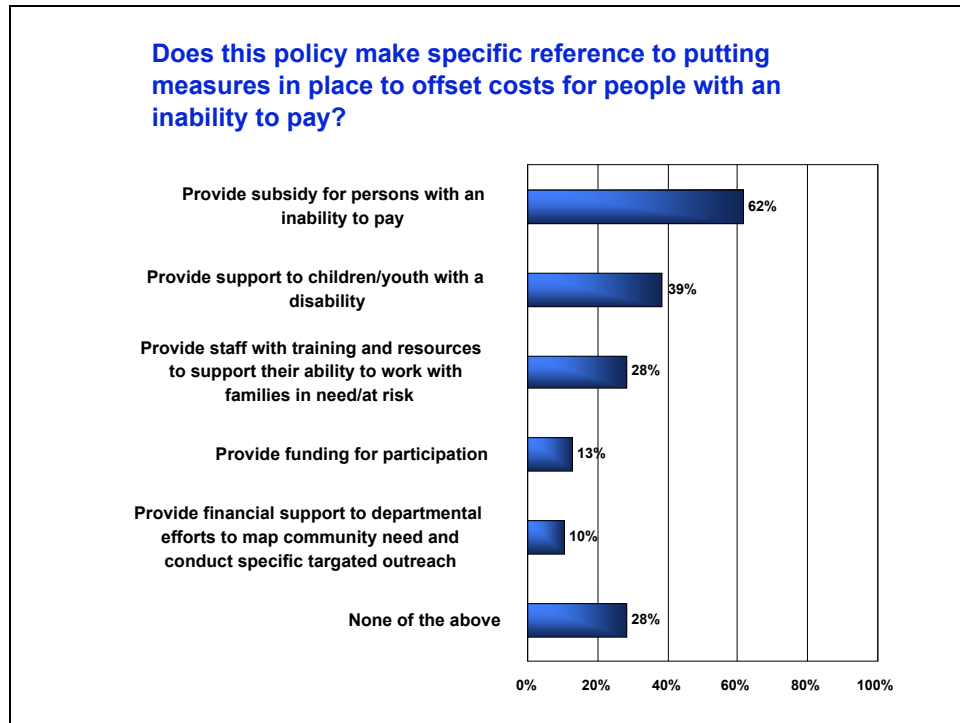
Most municipalities apply their policies broadly. Among those municipalities with a policy dealing with equity of access to recreation, 84% include access both to programs and facilities in the policy. Close to three quarters (71%) include access to services. These results do not vary significantly by the population of the municipality. Compared to the 2006 survey results, these results are higher for facilities and services, and lower for programs.



**Measures to offset costs for people with an inability to pay**

Approximately three quarters of municipalities (74%) with a policy for equity of access to recreation make specific reference in the policy to providing subsidies for persons with an inability to pay. Almost half also have policies that make specific reference to providing support to children or youth with a disability (44%). About one quarter (26%) make reference to providing staff with training and resources to support their ability to work with families in need or at risk. Less common are policies that make reference to measures that provide financial support for departments to map community need and conduct outreach in identified communities (15%) and that provide funding for items such as transportation or equipment to improve participation (7%).

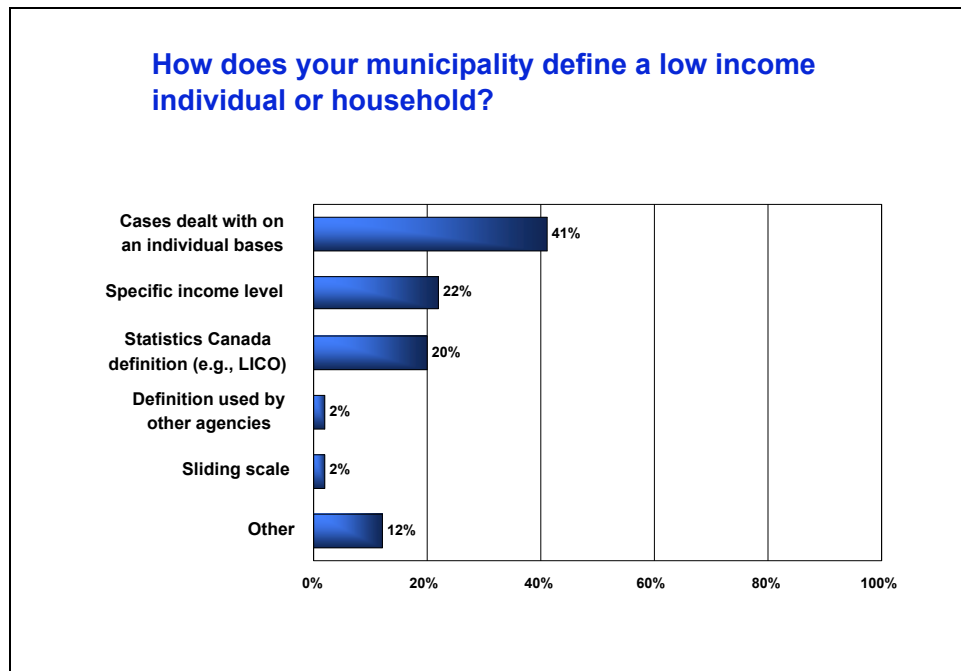
About four out of 10 municipalities (41%) link their policy to a specific budget allocation to offset the costs for people with an inability to pay. Only about half again of the respondents with these municipalities could specify the annual amount of this budget allocation (which is too few a number to provide statistically valid results).



**Defining a low income household or individual**

About four out of 10 municipalities (41%) define a low income individual or household on an individual, case-by-case basis. About one in five use either a specific income level (22%) or a Statistics Canada definition (typically the Low Income Cutoff).

One (1) non-profit organization uses a sliding scale to define low income individuals and households. The second non-profit organization has a policy, for each member service organization, to define low income that is specific to the area served, but most use an income of \$25,000 as a guide.



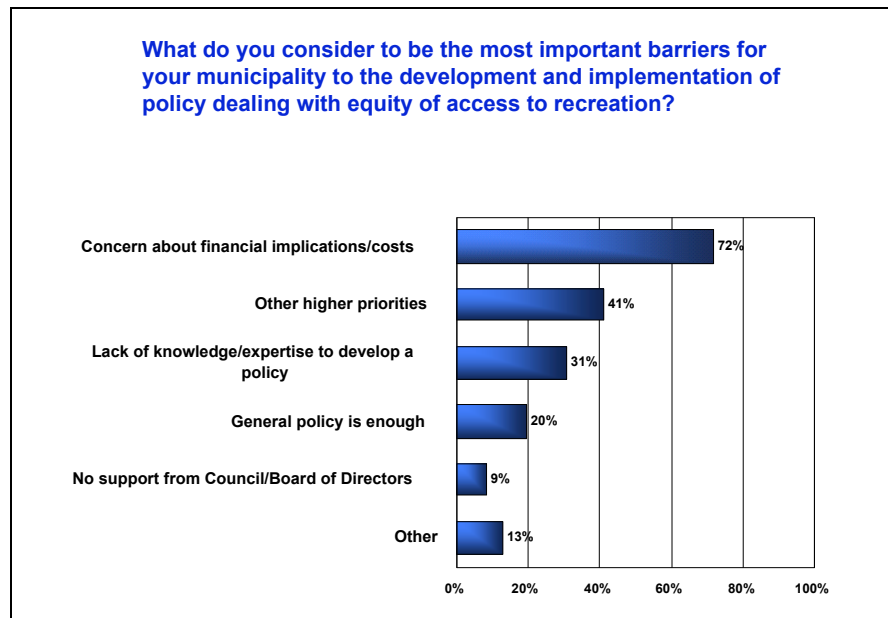
### Barriers to developing and implementing a policy

Concern about the costs and financial implications were identified as the top barrier to the development and implementation of policy dealing with equity of access to recreation. Overall, 72% of municipalities identified these costs and the financial implications as an important barrier, including 88% of those with a policy for equity of access to recreation and 67% of those without such a policy. Other important barriers identified by at least one in five municipalities overall include the following:

- Other higher priorities (identified by 41% of respondents);
- Lack of knowledge or expertise to develop a policy (31%); and,
- The view that a general policy is enough and that a recreation-specific policy is not needed (20% overall, including just 4% of municipalities that already have an equity of access to recreation policy and 29% of municipalities without such a policy).

A lack of support from the municipal Council was identified less frequently (9% overall, including 4% of municipalities with an equity of access to recreation policy, 9% of those without a policy, and 14% of those with a policy in development).

One (1) non-profit organization sees the lack of knowledge or expertise to develop a policy as the most important barrier. The second non-profit organization sees concern about the financial implications and costs as the most important barrier.

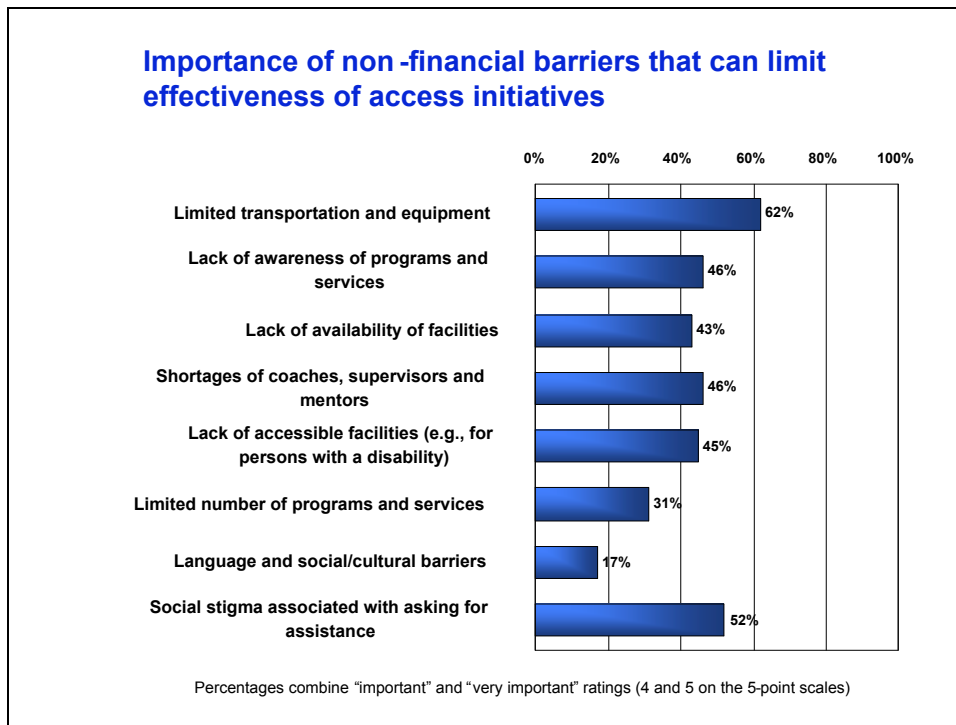


### Non-financial barriers that limit access to recreation

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of eight barriers, other than money and financial barriers that can limit the effectiveness of fee supports or other access to recreation programs and initiatives offered by municipalities. Two of these barriers – limited transportation and equipment, and the social stigma associated with asking for financial assistance – were identified by a majority of municipalities as important or very important barriers (i.e., ratings of 4 or 5 on the five-point scales).

- *Limited transportation and equipment* - 62% of respondents rated this as important, including 25% who rated it as very important (i.e., a rating of 5 on the 5-point scale).
- *Social stigma associated with asking for financial assistance* – 52% rated this as important, including 23% who rated it as very important.
- *Lack of awareness of programs and services* - 46% rated this as important, including 14% who rated it as very important.
- *Shortage of coaches, supervisors and mentors* – 46% also rated this as important, including 17% who rated it as very important.
- *Lack of accessible facilities for persons with a disability* – 45% rated this as important, including 14% who rated it as very important.
- *Lack of availability of facilities* – 43% rated this as important, including 18% who rated it as very important.
- *Limited number of programs and services (e.g., waiting lists)* – 31% rated this as important, including 9% who rated it as very important.

- *Language and cultural/social barriers* – 17% rated this as important, including 2% who rated it as very important.



One (1) non-profit organization identified limited transportation and equipment and language and cultural/social barriers as very important non-financial barriers. The second non-profit organization identified limited transportation and equipment, a limited number of programs and services, and a lack of awareness of programs and services as the most important non-financial barriers.

### 3. Practices for Improving Access to Municipal Facilities and Programs

The survey included several questions dealing with practices for improving access to recreation facilities and programs including partnership arrangements, responsibilities for collecting user fees, fee reduction practices and mechanisms, and eligibility criteria for reduced fees.

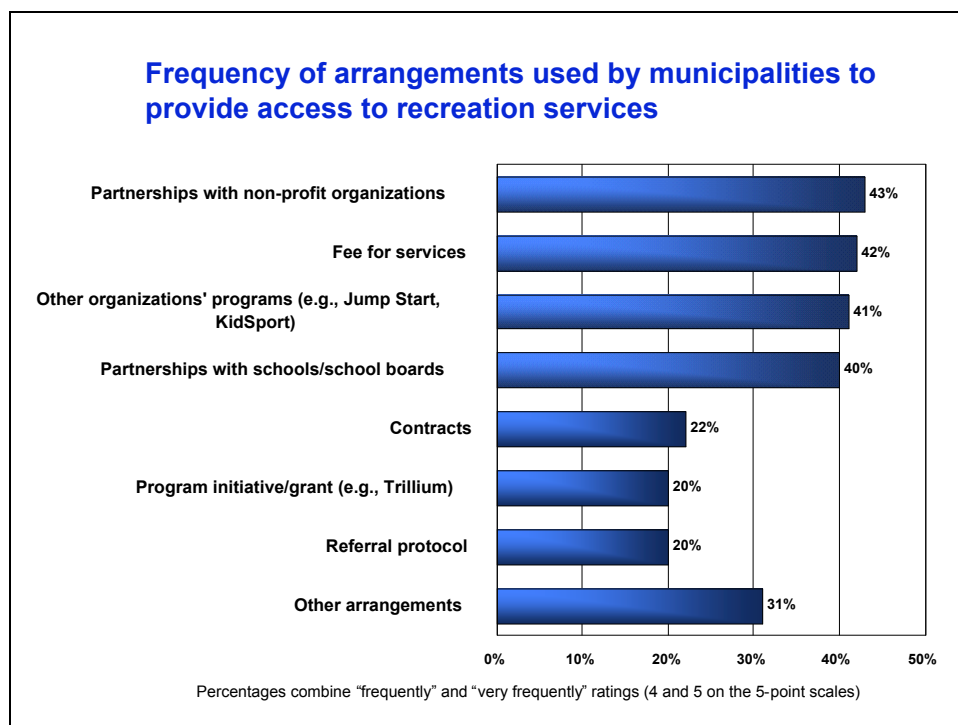
#### Partnership arrangements

Most municipalities work with other organizations in their community to provide access to recreation for low income families. Across the province, about three quarters of municipalities (72%) work with other organizations to improve access. This includes 95% of municipalities with a policy for equity of access to recreation (or one in development) and 74% of municipalities without such a policy.

The types of arrangements between municipalities and other organizations that are used frequently include the following:

- Partnerships with non-profit organizations – 43%;
- Fee for service – 42%;
- Other organizations’ programs (e.g., Jump Start, KidSport) – 41%;
- Partnerships with schools/school boards – 40%; and,
- Other arrangements – 31%.

Other arrangements involve sharing office space, and sharing facilities and other resources.



Municipalities with a policy for equity of access to recreation are more likely than municipalities without such a policy to enter into partnerships with other organizations.

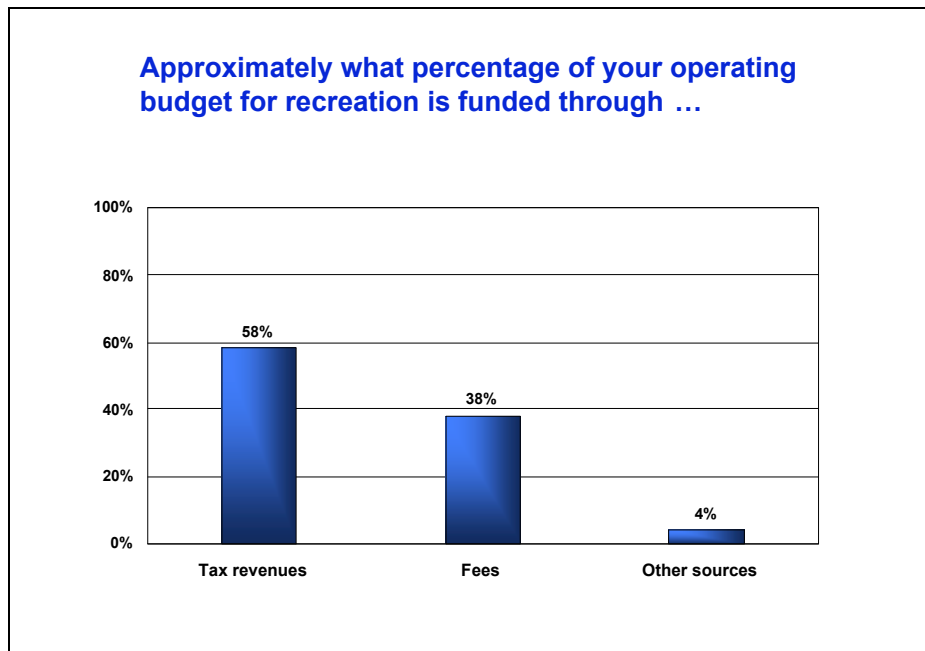
- *Contracts* – 33% of municipalities with a policy have contracts frequently or very frequently compared to 18% of municipalities without a policy;
- *Referral protocol* – used frequently by 43% of municipalities with a policy compared to 14% of municipalities without a policy;
- *Program initiatives and grants* – used frequently by 27% of municipalities with a policy compared to 18% of municipalities without a policy;
- *Other organizations' programs* – used frequently by 77% of municipalities with a policy compared to 32% of municipalities without a policy;
- *Partnerships with non-profit organizations* – used frequently by 61% of municipalities with a policy compared to 38% of municipalities without a policy;
- *Partnerships with schools and school boards* – used frequently by 52% of municipalities with a policy compared to 37% of municipalities without a policy.

*Fee for service arrangements* (i.e., purchasing services from other organizations) are used equally by municipalities with a policy for equity of access to recreation (40%) and municipalities without a policy (39%).

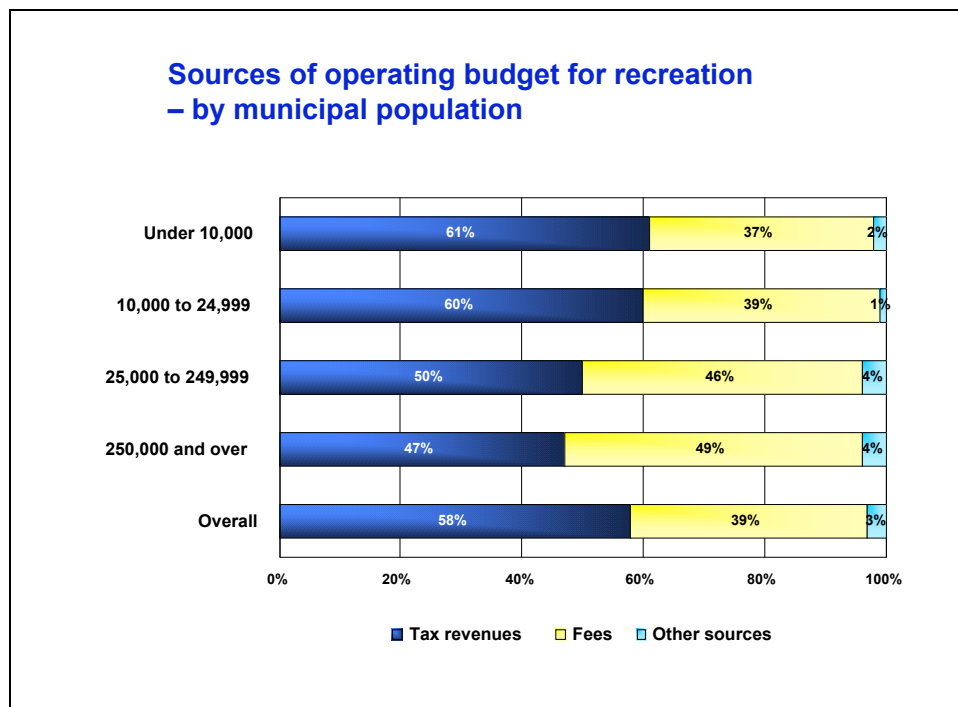
Frequency of use of these different types of arrangements is not strongly related to the size of the municipality, although larger municipalities tend to make more use of referral protocols and other organizations' programs, and to enter into partnerships with other organizations.

### **Budget context**

Overall, municipalities derive 58% of their operating budgets for recreation from tax revenues. Well over one third (38%) comes from user fees, and a small percentage (4%) comes from other sources (e.g., ad revenues, sponsors, government grants).



Larger municipalities generate a higher portion of their operating budgets for recreation from user fees. The largest municipalities with a population of 250,000 and over actually derive a higher proportion of their operating budgets for recreation from user fees (49%) than from tax revenues (47%). For smaller municipalities with a population under 25,000, the tax revenue/user fee ratio is approximately a 60/40 split.

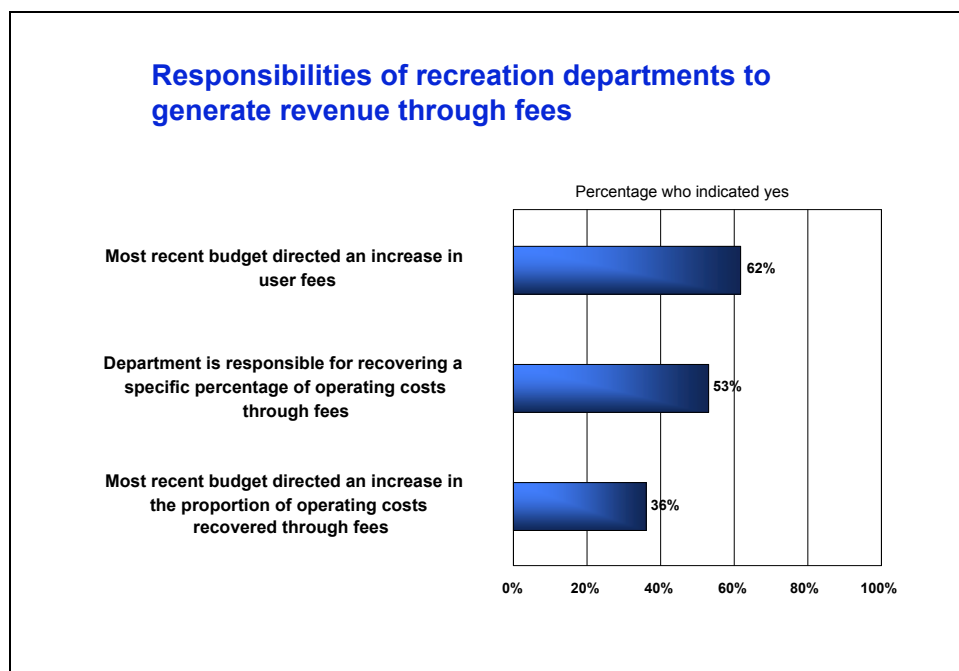


### Responsibility for collecting user fees

Close to two thirds of municipalities (62%) received direction to increase user fees in their most recent municipal budget. This percentage is similar for municipalities across all population categories. It is only slightly lower for small municipalities with a population of less than 10,000 (53%).

A majority of municipalities (53%) reported that their department responsible for recreation is required to cover a specific percentage of the operating costs of their facilities and programs through user fees. This result is similar for municipalities across all population categories.

Over one third of respondents (36%) also reported that, in the most recent municipal budget, the department responsible for recreation was directed to increase the proportion of operating costs of facilities and programs recovered through user fees. Again, this result is similar for municipalities across most population categories, being lower only for small municipalities with a population of less than 10,000 (26%).



### Fee reduction practices - overall

Overall, over three quarters of respondents (77%) reported that their municipalities reduces or eliminates user fees and/or rates for at least some recreation facilities or programs. This includes 91% of municipalities with an equity of access to recreation policy and 70% of those without such a policy.

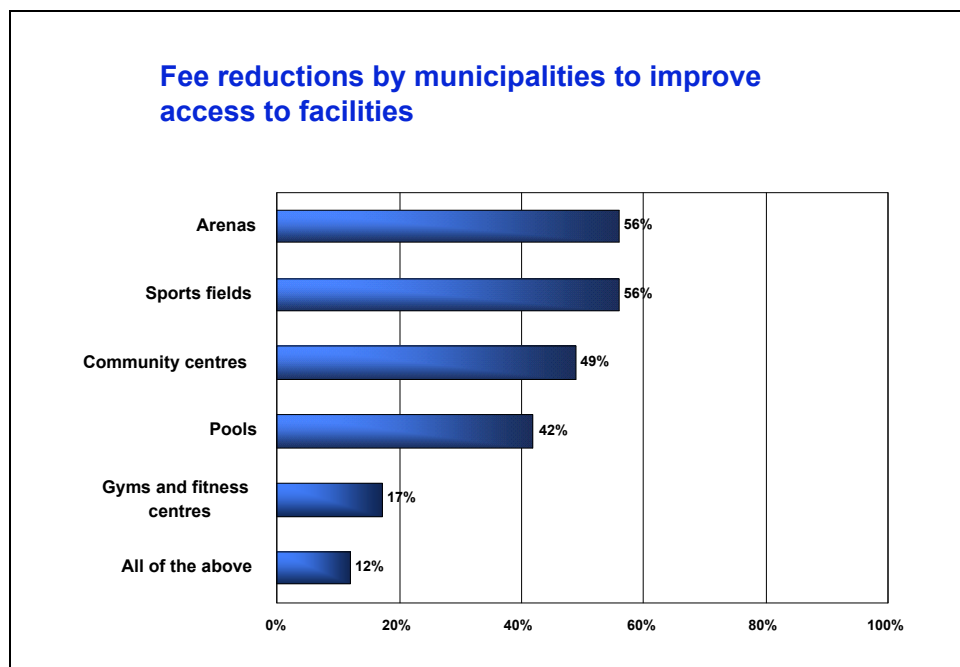
- Overall, two-thirds (66%) reported that their municipalities reduce or eliminate user, membership or permit fees for at least some of their recreation facilities.
- A similar percentage of respondents (64%) reported that their municipalities offer programs where user fees and related costs are reduced or eliminated.
- Over half of all municipalities (52%) reduce or eliminate fees and/or rates for both recreation facilities and programs.

**Fee reductions for facilities**

Among the municipalities that reduce or remove membership fees, permit or usage fees to improve access to recreation facilities (66% overall), 12% apply reductions to all types of facilities including swimming pools, arenas, community centres, gyms and fitness centres, and sports fields.

In addition to the 12% who apply reductions to all types of facilities, over half reduce fees for arenas (56%) and sports fields (56%). Close to half reduce or remove fees for community centres (49%) and swimming pools (42%). Fewer municipalities apply fee reductions to gyms and fitness centres (17%).

Both non-profit organizations reduce or remove fees for pools and gyms and fitness centres. One (1) non-profit organization also reduces fees for community centres.



### **Instructional activities**

Just over half of the respondents reported that their municipalities offer instructional activities that are low cost and affordable. The range of these activities is very broad and includes, for example:

- Numerous sports including swimming, hockey, figure skating, soccer, archery, and martial arts;
- Fitness, exercise, and yoga;
- Dance;
- Arts and arts and crafts;
- Cooking;
- CPR and first aid;
- Parenting;
- Babysitting;
- Special needs programs;
- Day camps;
- Youth drop-ins;
- Adult interest courses including woodworking, akido, and photography; and,
- Seniors lunch and cards.

### **Fee reductions for programs**

Municipalities are most likely to offer reduced fees for sports programs. Among the municipalities that reduce or eliminate user fees and related costs for programs, over two-thirds (68%) reduce or eliminate them for sports programs. A majority of municipalities (54%) also reduce or remove fees for general recreation programs such as fitness and games.

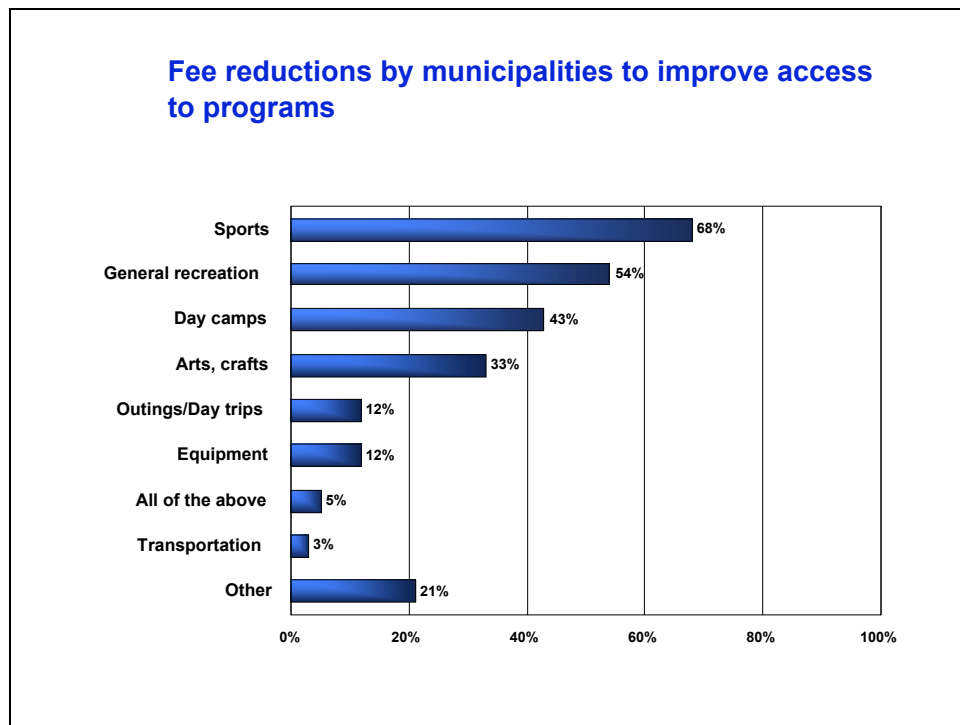
A third or more of municipalities reduce or eliminate fees for day camps (43%) and arts and crafts programs (33%). Fewer reduce or remove fees for outings and day trips (12%) and equipment (12%). Very few reduce or remove fees for transportation (3%). Just 5% of municipalities reduce or remove fees for all of these types of programs.

About one in five municipalities (21%) reported that they reduce or remove fees for other types of programs including, for example, swimming and swim lessons, public skating, “community social programs”, a March break program, and a neighbourhood park drop-in program.

These results do not vary significantly by the population size of the municipality.

Municipalities with a policy for equity of access to recreation are more likely than municipalities without such a policy to reduce or remove fees for general recreation programs (70% compared to 53%), day camps (60% compared to 40%), and arts and crafts programs (50% compared to 26%). However, municipalities without an access policy were more likely to reduce or remove fees for sports programs (68% compared to 55% of municipalities with a policy).

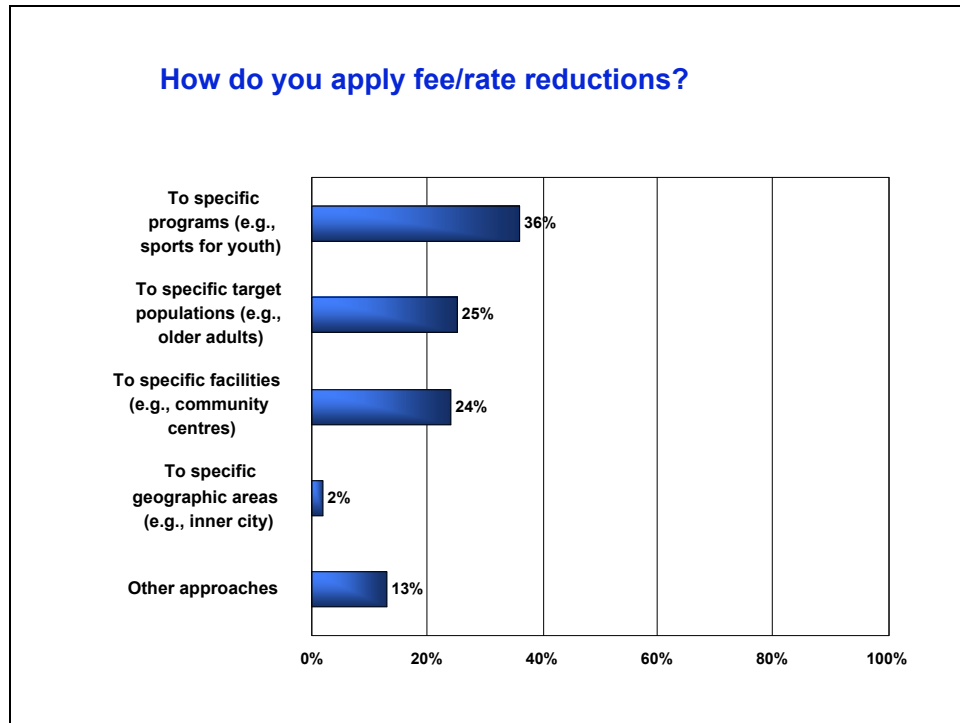
One (1) non-profit organization reported that it reduces or removes all types of fees and expenses to improve access to programs. The second non-profit organization also reduces all types of fees and program-related expenses except those for equipment and transportation.



About one in six respondents (16%) reported that their municipality targets fee reductions in ways other than to programs or facilities. Examples of these other ways include partnerships and sponsorships, an Accessibility Advisory Committee, lower fees for programs in disadvantaged areas, and grants to specific organizations for recreation.

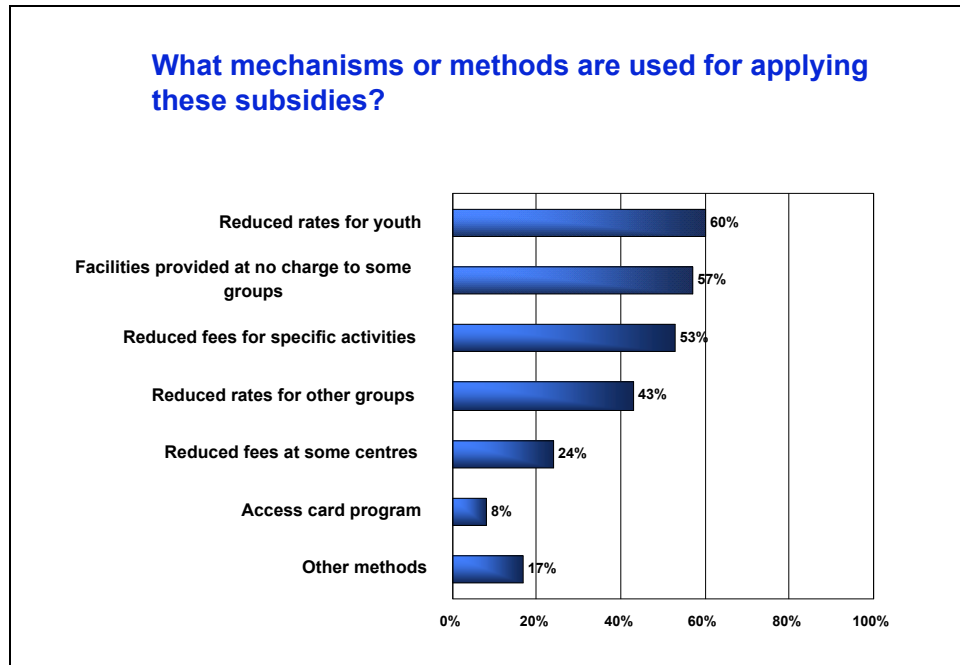
**Application of fee and rate reductions**

Municipalities apply fee and rate reductions most frequently to specific programs such as sports for youth. Over one third of municipalities (36%) apply fee and rate reductions in this manner. One quarter of municipalities apply fee and rate reductions to specific target populations such as older adults (25%) and at specific facilities such as community centres (24%). Very few (2%) apply fee and rate reductions to specific geographic areas (e.g., inner city).



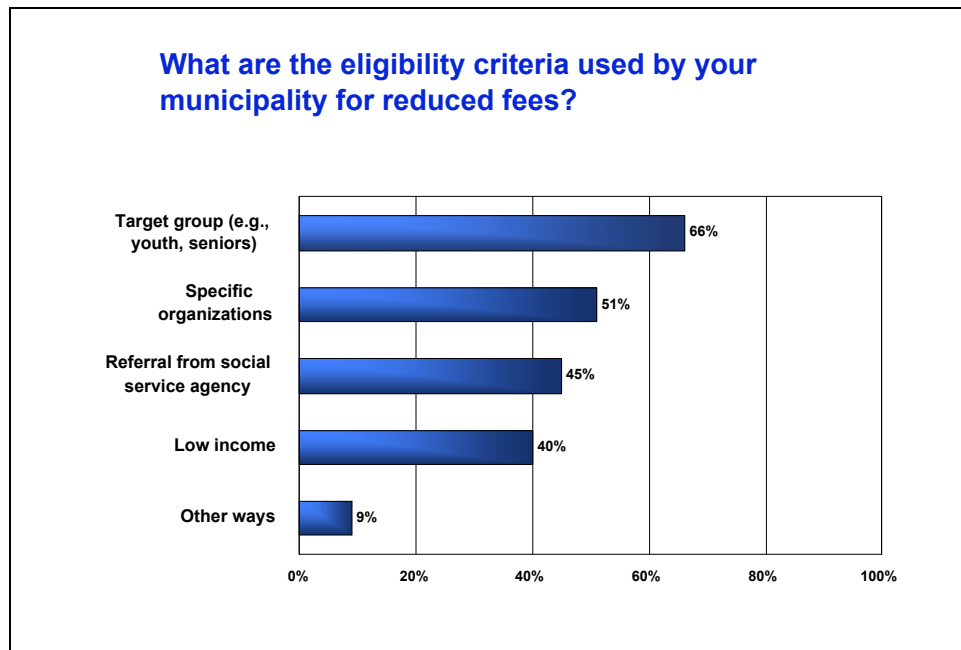
**Mechanisms or methods used to apply fee subsidies**

Respondents were asked about the mechanisms or methods used by their municipalities for applying these subsidies. A majority of municipalities reduced rates for youth (60%), provide facilities at no cost to some groups (57%), and reduce fees for specific activities (53%). Almost half reduce rates for other groups (43%), and one quarter reduce fees at some centres (24%), for example centres in some geographic areas. Few municipalities offer an access card program (8%).



**Eligibility criteria**

For the eligibility criteria used to reduce fees, two-thirds of municipalities (66%) use target groups such as youth and seniors. Half base eligibility on specific organizations (51%). Close to half base eligibility on referrals from social service agencies (45%) and on low income (40%).



A majority of municipalities (64%) determine eligibility for fee subsidies on their own. One quarter (24%) determine eligibility both on their own and with the assistance of a third-party agency such as Ontario Works or a service organization. The remaining 12% rely exclusively on third-party agencies.

Municipalities with a population of 100,000 or higher are more likely to determine eligibility with the assistance of a third-party agency (47%).

Both non-profit organizations use low income and referrals from social service agencies as eligibility criteria for reduced fees. One (1) non-profit organization also uses membership in specific organizations.

### **Other approaches for increasing access**

Almost three quarters of respondents (72%) reported that their municipalities plan capital expenditures for recreation infrastructure such as parks and open spaces, outdoor ice pads, splash pads, basketball courts, drop-in centres, and youth and community centre to create more universal access.

Larger municipalities were more likely to report these types of capital expenditures: i.e., 93% of municipalities with a population of 25,000 or higher compared to 74% of those with a population between 10,000 and 25,000 and 57% of those with a population of fewer than 10,000.

There are also some differences by geographic region in the proportion of municipalities reporting these types of capital expenditures:

- Toronto and area – 100%;
- Central – 81%;
- Eastern – 70%;
- Northeastern – 64%;
- Southwestern – 63%; and,
- Northwestern – 57%.

### **Data collection on beneficiaries of fee subsidies**

Slightly under one third of respondents (32%) indicated that their municipalities collect data on the numbers of groups and individuals benefiting from reduced fees.

The collection of this data is strongly related to the size of the municipality: i.e., 80% of municipalities with a population of 250,000 or higher; 56% of those with a population between 25,000 and 250,000; and 21% of those with a population under 10,000.

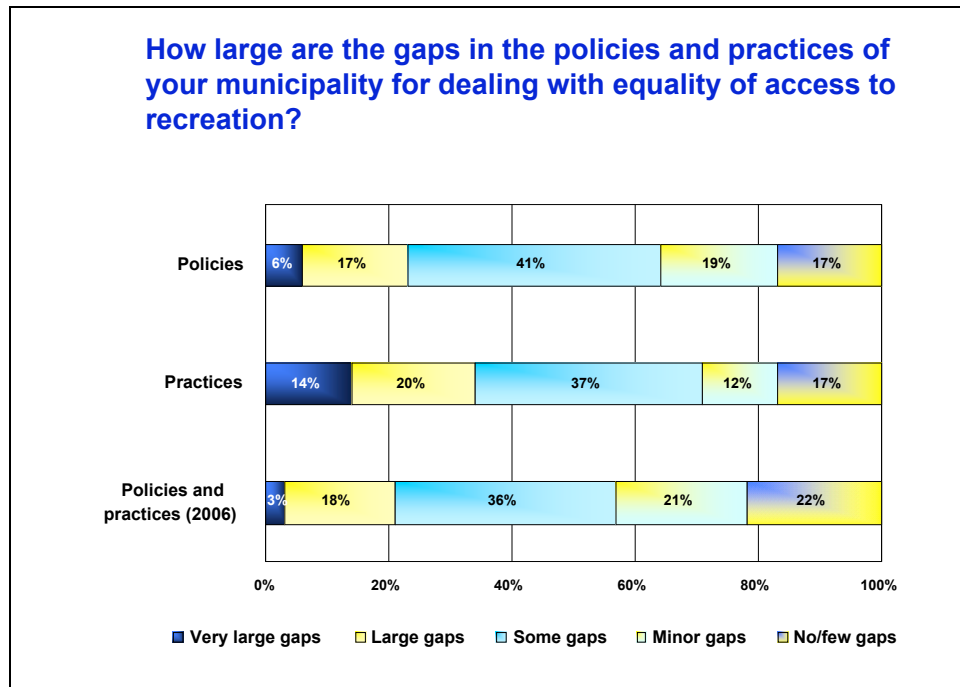
Both non-profit organizations collect data on the numbers of groups and individuals benefiting from reduced fees. One (1) non-profit organization collects detailed data on the number of individuals, along with their name, address, age, type of use, and length of stay. The second non-profit organization collects annual data through their national office.

### **Gaps in policies and programs**

A majority of municipalities think there are some gaps in their policies and practices for dealing with equality of access to recreation.

- For policies, 64% of respondents indicated that there are at least some gaps, including 23% who indicated there are large gaps.
- For practices, 71% of respondents indicated that there are at least some gaps, including 34% who indicated there are large gaps.

These proportions are higher than the 57% of respondents who indicated in the 2006 survey that their municipalities had gaps in their policies and practices (which was asked as a single question in 2006). While the survey results do not provide the evidence to identify the reasons for this change, some comments from respondents suggest that the difference may be the result of both greater awareness of the issue and more recognition of the gaps in programs and policies to address it.



Municipalities in the 100,000 to 250,000 population range are the most likely to report large gaps in both policies and practices:

- 91% of respondents with these mid to large size municipalities reported gaps in policies, including 36% who reported large gaps; and,
- 90% reported gaps in practices, including 50% who reported large gaps.

The largest municipalities with a population of 250,000 and over were the least likely to report large gaps in policies and practices. Although most respondents with these large municipalities reported some gaps, none reported large gaps in policies and only 20% reported large gaps in practices.

One (1) non-profit organization reported just minor gaps in policies and practices, with the only gap being that there is not enough funding to offer more programs for children and youth. The second non-profit organization indicated that there are some gaps in policies but very few gaps in practices.

## 4. Communications

### Communications about fee reductions

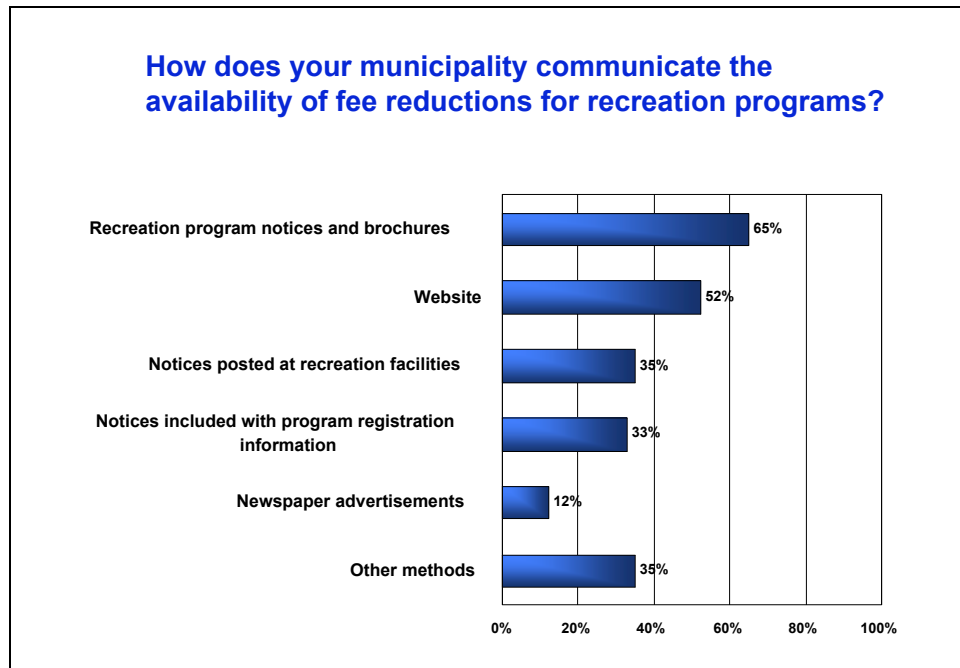
Just over one third of municipalities (36%) communicate the availability of fee reductions for recreation programs to the general public through advertising, public notices or other widely available means. This includes almost all municipalities with an equity of access to recreation policy (87%) and just 21% of municipalities without a policy (although most of these offer fee reductions at facilities and/or programs).

While few respondents mentioned concerns about oversubscription as a deterrent to broadening communications about fee reductions, many indicated that more funding is needed to expand fee reductions and other access policies and programs.

### Methods of communication

Recreation program notices and brochures are used most frequently to communicate fee reductions for recreation programs, with 65% of municipalities reporting that they use these types of printed materials. Among municipalities who indicated that they make information about fee subsidies widely available, 92% use printed materials (compared to 36% of municipalities that do not make the information widely available).

A majority of municipalities also use their website (52%) to communicate information about fee reductions for recreation programs. Notices posted at recreation facilities (35%) and notices included with program registration information (33%) also are used frequently. Newspaper advertisements (12%) are used much less frequently. Over one third (35%) indicated that they use other methods including, for example, word of mouth, working with service organizations and minor sports organizations, and responding to inquiries at recreation facilities.



Both non-profit organizations make the information about their fee reduction programs widely available to the public through a variety of means. Neither non-profit organization uses newspaper advertisements.

### **Communications through staff and volunteers**

Close to three quarters of municipalities (72%) rely at least to some extent on word of mouth through staff and volunteers to communicate about fee reduction programs. This includes almost half (46%) who rely largely on staff and volunteers for word of mouth communications (i.e., a rating of 4 or 5 on the 5-point scale). These results are similar for municipalities with and without a policy for equity of access to recreation.

### **Communications through partner organizations and third party agencies**

Close to half of municipalities communicate the availability of fee reductions through other organizations. Overall, 44% of municipalities communicate the availability of fee reductions for recreation programs to the general public and/or targeted groups and individuals through partner organizations and third party agencies such as Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program.

Municipalities that communicate the availability of fee reductions through partner organizations and third party agencies include:

- Over three quarters of municipalities (76%) with a policy for equity of access to recreation, 57% of municipalities with a policy under development, and just one third municipalities (33%) without such policy; and,

- Over 80% of larger municipalities with a population over 50,000 and about 50% of smaller communities, with a population of less than 50,000 (including only 24% of those with a population under 10,000).

### **Satisfaction with communications about fee subsidies**

Among municipalities that offer fee subsidies, just under half (48%) are satisfied that their communications about the availability of fee reductions for recreation programs are reaching the intended audiences: 43% are satisfied and just 5% are very satisfied (i.e., a rating of 5 on the 5-point scale). Well over one third (38%) are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, an indication that they may not know the results of their communications.

### **Improving communications and outreach**

Respondents were asked their opinions about ways to improve communications and outreach about the availability of fee reduction programs. The following quotations are illustrative of the range of comments.

- “More advertising and more cooperation between user groups and community organizations.”
- “Through community agencies and groups.”
- “Since the people are usually covered through provincial programmes via a local service agency, the local service agency needs to stay up to date on what is going on in the community.”
- “I think that the municipality should be using partners and stakeholders to communicate this message (neighbourhood centres, OW, ODSP and the school boards).”
- “Additional promotion by both municipality and agencies servicing clients.”
- “More money invested.”
- “Support from the parents, support from schools, assistance from social service agencies.”
- “Reach out to kids through schools and with partnerships with other organizations.”
- “Providing the information in other languages as many families that need assistance do not speak English as a first language.”
- “Programs, services and processes should be advertised in languages other than just English and French.”
- “More targeted communication to ensure we are getting to the people who actually require assistance.”
- “Increased advertising in department brochures, need specific policy on how to award subsidies and to be somewhat fair.”
- “Need formal policy - then a communication effort.”
- “A more finite recreation policy has to be developed.”
- “Policy creation is the foundation - clear communication will result from the policy.”

## **Suggestions for programs and initiatives to improve access to recreation**

To conclude the survey, respondents were asked for their suggestions for programs and initiatives to improve access to recreation for low income households. The following quotations are illustrative of the range of suggestions.

### ***Funding***

- “Government funding. We need to pay staff, as volunteers are scarce. We would provide the staff and resources if we could get funding.”
- “We specifically need some type of community fund/program that can be accessed for any recreation activity. This fund needs to have the flexibility to provide assistance for transportation and equipment. In order to be successful this fund would have to have community ‘buy in’ in order to provide access to a variety of recreation activities. Funding for this type of initiative would need to come from a variety of sources including local and provincial governments.”
- “It would be great if Trillium / Provincial and Federal Departments who recognize the growing issue of lack of participation of low income children and youth would develop granting programs that would encourage municipalities to offer more programs and services to their communities and to ensure that those programs offered were known about, and attended by those who would benefit the most.”
- “More money is required in order to provide more assistance. Programs such as Jumpstart assist the municipality in reaching more people, however, we do not have enough money to provide access to all who need - the working poor miss out on participation due to costs.”
- “As a small rural municipality with limited resources, we would need financial assistance to be able to provide fee reductions to low income families.”
- “Provincial subsidies to the municipalities to defray cost of operating programs.”
- “Provincial subsidies would encourage municipalities to promote fee reductions to a greater level.”
- “Grants to municipalities would be a start so that the programs could be staffed adequately, followed by grants to low-income households and other target groups that could be applied directly to specific programs - in other words, if the programs get downloaded/mandated to the municipalities that are already in deficit positions, it isn't going to happen.”

### ***Information and advocacy***

- “We would be very interested in seeing best practices with regard to policies that have been established and programs that are in place. Advocacy is needed to convince Council to adopt practices.”
- “We need to have a better professional voice, we have tried several times to establish a professional validation as other recognized professions and they get more attention and support. We need to validate our profession!”

- “This is really something that must first be instigated through Council. Once a decision is made, that fee reduction for low-income households and other target groups is a mandate that they would like to pursue, then plans to improve access can be made. Right now we work with non-profit organizations who make this part of their mandate. Access could be improved if these agencies approached Town Council for support.”
- “The municipality must become more involved in the recreation field to help the volunteers develop and operate the programs.”
- “Municipal Council needs to have a better understanding of the Benefits of Parks and Recreation (it has been made available) beyond just the obvious. We have a concern as to how we will accommodate all deserving people who require any form of assistance once the NCB funding claw-back ends. Our Municipal Council needs to understand that everyone should have the *Right to Play* and to that end we are running a *Right to Play* workshop in our community soon.”
- “Not suggestions for programs. However, what would be helpful to me is to see other policies from other communities that have progressive access initiatives. This may help our community to move forward with better access for all, through updated policy development.”
- “Parents must first understand the importance of sports and recreation activities or the children will not have the commitment/interest.”

### ***Working with partners***

- “May have to work more closely with various agencies to identify if there are any problem areas and then develop solutions.”
- “Best practises in working with other organizations: e.g., CAS, Pathways Children Centre, YMCA, St. Clair Child and Youth Centre... a great way to service these families and share other resources.”

### ***Reducing the social stigma***

- “Reducing the ‘negative stigma’ of asking for assistance. There are families very familiar with social assistance and have no problem asking for other assistance, but there are also families that are not on social assistance but too proud or embarrassed to seek financial assistance and their children will lose out on programs.”
- “The issue is not so much about communicating the availability, but rather having a process that is non threatening or humiliating to the applicant... People are embarrassed to ask for help and as a result they choose not to become involved or to involve their families.”

***Ability to pay, fee policies***

- “I think that all fees should be on sliding scale and that there should be upfront marketing of the program to remove the stigma attached to asking for assistance. A leaflet campaign in the schools would be a great way to start.”
- “We need to complete a fair fee policy to deal with all the recreation fees.”
- “Sorting through the needs of subsidies is time consuming and political in a small town. Finding a way to improve this would make it easier to make sure that people in need have access to the subsidies.”

***Education and training***

- “More education for staff on identifying low-income needs and/or gaps. We react well when someone approaches us but we have not been proactive enough in identifying this need.”

## **Appendix A:**

### **Access to Recreation Survey Questionnaire – annotated with overall statistics for municipalities**

#### **Introduction**

The Ontario Access to Recreation Task Group appreciates you taking the time to complete this survey. The information provided by you and representatives of other municipalities across Ontario will help PRO to understand the policies, funding strategies, and resources being applied to reducing barriers to recreation and sport for low income children and youth.

The following definitions may clarify the terms used in the survey.

**Access** – policies, programs and approaches to increase opportunities to participate in recreation programs, facilities and services for children and youth facing barriers to participation.

**Subsidies** – reducing user fees as a means of improving access.

**Grants** – any funding which supports the capacity of municipalities to reduce user fees such as rental fees, registration fees, etc.

**Policy** – a governing set of principles given force and effect by elected officials in order to meet recognized public needs; policy set out what government intends to do and chooses not to do.

**Practice** – an activity that is routinely performed, regardless of whether it is required in policy or specified in procedure; an accepted method of standardized activity.

**Policies for Improving Access to Recreation for low income children and youth**

1.a Does your municipality have a Council-approved policy dealing with equity of access to recreation for all residents?

Yes .....	1	24.8%	
No .....	2	64.8%	
In development .....	3	10.3	n = 145

Expected date to be brought to Council: \_\_\_\_\_

b Is this policy published (e.g., on the municipal website) or otherwise made readily available to the public?

Yes .....	1	63.0%	
No .....	2	37.0%	n = 27

2. Does this policy include access to recreational facilities, programs, and services? Check all that apply.

Facilities.....	1	84.1%	
Programs .....	2	84.1%	
Services.....	3	70.5%	n = 44

3. What are the guiding principles of this policy? Check all that apply.

Recreation for all .....	1	66.7%	
Fees should not be a barrier.....	2	47.1%	
Financial assistance based on income.....	3	45.1%	
Support for target groups (e.g., children, seniors).....	4	27.5%	
For people in need .....	5	41.2%	
Other (please specify) _____ .....	6	15.7%	n = 51

4. How does your municipality define a low income individual or household?

Statistics Canada definition (e.g., LICO).....	1	20.4%	
Specific income level (individual or family/household).....	2	22.4%	
Sliding scale .....	3	2.0%	
Definition used by other agencies (e.g., Housing Authority) .....	4	2.0%	
No specific definition/cases dealt with on an individual basis .....	5	40.8%	
Other (please specify) _____ .....	6	12.2%	n = 49

5. Does this policy make specific reference to putting measures in place to offset costs for people with an inability to pay? Check all that apply.

Provide subsidy for persons with an inability to pay .....	1	74.1%	
Provide support to children/youth with a disability .....	2	44.4%	
Provide funding for participation (i.e. transportation, equipment) .....	3	7.4%	
Provide staff with training and resources to support their ability to work with families in need/at risk.....	4	25.9%	
Provide financial support to departmental efforts to map community need and conduct specific and targeted outreach in identified communities .....	5	14.8%	
None of the above .....	6	18.5%	n = 39

6.a Is the policy linked to a specific budget allocation to offset costs for people with an inability to pay?

Yes .....	1	38.2%	
No.....	2	61.8%	n = 34

If yes:

b. Approximately what is the annual amount of this budget allocation?

\$1,000 to \$25,000 .....	57%	
\$26,000 to \$100,000 .....	14%	
Over \$100,000 .....	29%	n = 14

c. What is the source of these funds? Check all that apply.

Municipal taxes .....	1	80.0%	
Fundraising .....	2	10.0%	
Provincial government.....	3	25.6%	
Other (please specify) _____ .....	4	35.0%	n = 20

### Practices for Improving Access to Recreation

7. What do you consider to be the most important barriers for your municipality to the development and implementation of policy dealing with equity of access to recreation? Check all that apply.

Concern about financial implications/costs .....	1	71.8%	
No support from Council / Board of Directors.....	2	8.5%	
Lack of knowledge/expertise to develop a policy .....	3	30.8%	
Other higher priorities .....	4	41.0%	
General policy is enough – a recreation-specific policy is not needed.....	5	19.7%	
Other (please specify).....	6	12.8%	n = 117

8. Many factors other than money and financial barriers can limit access to recreation. In your opinion, how important are the following barriers for limiting the effectiveness of fee supports or other access to recreation programs/initiatives offered by your municipality?

Barriers	Not at All Important	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important	n
a. Lack of availability of facilities .....	12.6%	10.2%	34.6%	24.4%	18.1%	127
b. Limited transportation/equipment.....	3.9%	7.1%	26.8%	37.0%	25.2%	127
c. Language and cultural/social barriers.....	28.6%	28.6%	26.2%	14.3%	2.4%	126
d. Limited number of programs and services (i.e. waiting lists).....	11.0%	28.3%	29.1%	22.0%	9.4%	127
e. Shortage of coaches, supervisors, mentors.....	5.5%	19.7%	29.1%	28.3%	17.3%	127
f. Lack of awareness of programs/services.....	5.6%	14.4%	34.4%	31.2%	14.4%	125
g. Social stigma associated with asking for financial assistance.....	8.9%	10.5%	28.2%	29.8%	22.6%	124
h. Lack of accessible facilities (e.g., for persons with a disability).....	7.9%	16.7%	31.0%	31.0%	13.5%	126
i. Other barriers .....	57.1%	20.0%	8.6%	5.7%	8.6%	35

If other barriers, please specify:

---

9. Does your municipality work with other organizations in your community to provide access to recreation for low income families?

Yes .....	1	72.4%	n = 123
No.....	2	27.6%	

10. To what extent does your municipality use the following types of arrangements to provide access to recreation services?

	Not at All	Very little	Sometimes	Frequently	Very Frequently	n
a. Contracts .....	39.6%	17.1%	21.6%	15.3%	6.3%	111
b. Fee for service.....	28.3%	6.2%	23.9%	23.0%	18.6%	113
c. Referral protocol.....	36.1%	16.7%	26.9%	15.7%	4.6%	108
d. Program/Initiative Grant (e.g., Trillium) .....	24.8%	16.8%	38.1%	15.9%	4.4%	113
e. Other organizations' programs (e.g., Jump Start, KidSport).....	25.6%	12.4%	21.5%	19.0%	21.5%	121
f. Partnerships with non-profit organizations .....	13.9%	12.2%	31.3%	27.8%	14.8%	115
g. Partnerships with schools/school boards.....	13.8%	13.8%	32.8%	23.3%	16.4%	116
h. Other arrangements .....	51.1%	4.4%	13.3%	11.1%	20.0%	45

If other arrangement, please specify:

---

11. Approximately what percentage of your operating budget for recreation is funded through:

- a) Tax revenues x = 58%
- b) Fees x = 38%
- c) Other sources x = 4%

n = 69

12. a In your most recent municipal budget, did the department responsible for recreation receive direction to increase user fees?

Yes .....	1	61.7%	
No .....	2	38.3%	n = 115

12. b Is the department responsible for recreation required to recover a specific percentage of the operating costs of facilities and programs through fees?

Yes .....	1	53.1%	
No .....	2	46.9%	n = 113

12. c In your most recent municipal budget, did the department responsible for recreation receive direction to increase the proportion of operating costs of facilities and programs recovered through fees?

Yes .....	1	35.5%	
No .....	2	64.5%	n = 110

13. Does your municipality hold community consultations on providing access to low income families?

Yes .....	1	8.8%	
No .....	2	91.2%	n = 113

### Fee Reduction Practices for Facilities

14. Does your municipality reduce or eliminate membership fees/ rates/permit or usage fees at any recreation facilities?

Yes .....	1	66.4%	
No .....	2	33.6%	n = 113

15. Are membership fees/ rates/permit or usage fees reduced or eliminated to improve access to the following types of facilities? Check all that apply.

Pools .....	1	41.5%	
Arenas .....	2	56.1%	
Community centres .....	3	48.8%	
Gyms and fitness centres .....	4	17.1%	
Sports fields .....	5	56.1%	
All of the above .....	6	12.2%	n = 82
Other .....	7		

If other facility, please specify:

---

**Fee Reduction Practices for Programs**

16. Does your municipality offer programs where fees and related costs to users are reduced or eliminated?

Yes .....	1	63.6%	
No.....	2	36.4%	n = 118

17. Are program fees and related costs reduced or eliminated for the following types of programs and program related expenses? Check all that apply.

Sports .....	1	67.8%	
Arts, crafts.....	2	33.3%	
General recreation: e.g., fitness, games.....	3	54.0%	
Equipment.....	4	11.5%	
Transportation.....	5	3.4%	
Day camps.....	6	42.5%	
Outings/Day trips.....	7	11.5%	
All of the above .....	8	4.6%	
Other (please specify below) .....	9	20.7%	n = 87

If other program type, please specify:

---

18.a Does your municipality target fee reduction programs in any other ways?

Yes .....	1	15.7%	
No.....	2	84.3%	n = 102

b. If yes: Please list examples of how fee reductions are targeted.

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19.a Does your municipality offer instructional activities that are low cost and affordable?

Yes .....	1	53.6%	
No.....	2	46.4%	n = 110

b. If yes: Please list these activities.

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20. How do you apply fee/rate reductions? Check all that apply.

To specific facilities: e.g., community centres.....	1	24.1%	
To specific geographic areas: e.g., inner city .....	2	1.8%	
To specific programs: e.g., sports for youth.....	3	36.1%	
To specific target populations: e.g., older adults.....	4	25.3%	
In other ways (please specify below) .....	5	12.7%	n = 89

If other, please specify:

---

21. What mechanisms or methods are used for applying these subsidies?

Access card program .....	1	8.4%	
Reduced rates for youth .....	2	60.0%	
Reduced rates for other groups .....	3	43.2%	
Reduced fees for specific activities .....	4	52.6%	
Facilities provided at no charge to some groups .....	5	56.8%	
Reduced fees at some centres (e.g., in some Geographic areas) .....	6	24.2%	
In other ways (please specify) .....	7	16.8%	n = 95

If other, please specify:

---

22.a What are the eligibility criteria used by your municipality for reduced fees? Check all that apply.

Low income.....	1	40.2%	
Referral from social service agency .....	2	45.4%	
Target group (e.g., youth, senior).....	3	66.0%	
Specific organizations .....	4	50.8%	
Other ways (please specify) .....	5	9.3%	n = 97

If other, please specify:

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b. How does one qualify for reduced fees?

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23. Does your municipality determine eligibility or is this done through a third-party agency (e.g., Ontario Works, service organization)?

We determine eligibility.....	1	64.2%	
Determined by a third-party .....	2	11.6%	
Both .....	3	24.2%	n = 95

#### Other Approaches for Increasing Access

24.a Does your municipality plan capital expenditures for recreation infrastructure to create more universal access: e.g., parks and open spaces, outdoor ice pads, splash pads, basketball courts, drop-in centres for youth, community and neighbourhood centres?

Yes .....	1	71.7%	
No.....	2	28.3%	n = 99

b. If yes: Please provide examples.

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25.a Does your municipality collect data on the numbers of groups and individuals benefiting from reduced fees?

Yes .....	1	31.8%	
No.....	2	68.2%	n = 107

b. If yes: What data do you collect and how do you collect it?

---

**Program Demand, Gaps, Unmet Needs**

26. In your opinion, how large are the gaps in the policies and practices of your municipality for dealing with equality of access to recreation?

	No/few gaps	Minor gaps	Some gaps	Large gaps	Very large gaps	n
a. Policies	16.8%	18.8%	41.6%	16.8%	5.9%	101
b. Practices	17.2%	12.1%	36.4%	20.2%	14.1%	99

c. Please briefly describe the most important gaps.

---

**Communications**

27. Does your municipality communicate the availability of fee reductions for recreation programs to the general public through advertising, public notices or other widely available means?

Yes .....	1	36.2%	
No.....	2	63.8%	n = 105

28. How does your municipality communicate the availability of fee reductions for recreation programs? Check all that apply.

Recreation program notices and brochures .....	1	65.2%	
Website .....	2	52.2%	
Newspaper advertisements.....	3	11.6%	
Notices posted at recreation facilities .....	4	34.8%	
Notices included with program registration information .....	5	33.3%	
Other methods (please specify) .....	6	34.8%	n = 69

If other methods, please specify:

---

29. To what extent does your municipality rely on word of mouth through staff and/or volunteers to provide information to the public about fee reductions?

Not at all	A little	To some extent	To a large extent	Completely/to a great extent	n
15.8%	11.9%	26.7%	36.6%	8.9%	101

30. Does your municipality communicate the availability of fee reductions for recreation programs to the general public and/or to targeted groups/individuals through partner organizations and/or third party agencies (i.e. Ontario Works recipients, Ontario Disability Support Program)?

Yes ..... 1 44.3%  
 No..... 2 55.7% n = 97

31. Overall, how satisfied are you with the extent to which communications about the availability of recreation fee reductions reaches the intended audiences?

Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither	Satisfied	Very satisfied	n
1.0%	13.5%	37.5%	42.7%	5.2%	96

32. In your opinion, what needs to be done to improve communications and outreach about the availability of fee reduction programs?

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**Best Practices**

33. To conclude, do you have any suggestions for programs or initiatives to improve access to recreation programs in your community for low-income households and other target groups?

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34. Do you have any other comments?

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**Municipal Characteristics**

35. In which geographic region of Ontario is your municipality located?

Northwestern .....	1	7.3%	
Northeastern.....	2	18.2%	
Central.....	3	15.5%	
Eastern.....	4	20.9%	
Toronto and Area.....	5	11.8%	
Southwestern.....	6	26.4%	n = 110

36. What is the total population of your municipality?

Under 10,000.....	1	51.9%	
10,000 to 24,999.....	2	20.4%	
25,000 to 49,999.....	3	7.4%	
50,000 to 99,999.....	4	4.6%	
100,000 to 249,999.....	5	10.2%	
250,000 and over.....	6	5.6%	n = 108

### Contact Information

Please provide your name and contact information in case we have any questions related to your responses to this survey. This information will be treated as confidential and will not be used by PRO for any other purpose unrelated to this survey.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Position: \_\_\_\_\_  
Municipality \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have completed your input to the survey, please submit by clicking on the 'Submit' button below. If you would like to review your responses, you may do so using the 'Previous' button below.

Please note that once your responses have been submitted you will no longer be able to re-enter the survey. If you have submitted your responses and need to re-visit your questionnaire, please contact David Redmond at [davidredmond@rogers.com](mailto:davidredmond@rogers.com).

If you have documents in electronic format on any policies or initiatives that you think would be helpful to this process, please send them to Isaiah Mwangi at [pro5@prontario.org](mailto:pro5@prontario.org).

Thank you for your assistance with this survey.