Towards A National Recreation Agenda

A Discussion Paper

Working Together to Foster Healthy, Flourishing and Sustainable Individuals, Communities and Environments

March 28th 2013
# Table of Contents

Preface ................................................................................................................................................. 1

1. BACKGROUND/CONTEXT .................................................................................................................. 1

2. A COMPELLING NEED TODAY ........................................................................................................... 2  
   2.1 Public Health Burden and Health Inequities ............................................................................... 4  
   2.2 Economic Performance versus Community Wellbeing ............................................................. 4

3. DEFINITION OF PUBLIC RECREATION ......................................................................................... 5

4. A VISION FOR THE RECREATION FIELD ..................................................................................... 7

5. A STRATEGIC APPROACH: FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS ............................................................. 8  
   5.1 On Being Intentional: A Values/Principles Foundation ............................................................... 8  
   5.2 Positioning Public Recreation Field ............................................................................................ 8  
   5.3 Principles and Values ..................................................................................................................... 10

6. A BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION ............................................................................................................. 11  
   6.1 Guiding Policy and Governance ................................................................................................ 11  
   6.2 Community Building: The First Cornerstone .......................................................................... 11  
   6.3 Citizen building: The Second Cornerstone ................................................................................. 13  
   6.4 Environmental Sustainability: The Third Cornerstone ............................................................. 14  
   6.5 Economic Development and Diversification .............................................................................. 15  
   6.6 Recreation Sector Innovation, Research and Knowledge Management .................................... 15

7. FORGING AHEAD ............................................................................................................................... 17  
   7.1 Building a Bigger Tent ............................................................................................................... 17  
   7.2 Collaborative Initiatives ............................................................................................................. 17  
   7.3 Interactive Communications Strategy ......................................................................................... 18  
   7.4 A Unifying Structure for the Field .............................................................................................. 18  
   7.5 Strategic Alliances, Mechanisms and Leadership ..................................................................... 18  
   7.6 Align Resources ......................................................................................................................... 19

8. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION POINTS .............................................................................................. 19
Preface

The 1987 National Recreation Statement resulted from a joint policy development process of the federal and provincial/territorial (F/P/T) governments and the recreation field represented by the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) designed to clarify the purpose and functionality of recreation as a public service as well as to outline the role of all three levels of government in the delivery of recreation services.

Beginning in 2010, an Active Canada 20/20 process resulted in a strategy document that has not been approved formally through any senior government structure, but has widespread support. It includes elements of vision, goal, principals, policy, and strategy; laying out what needs to be done, but with little in the way of an implementation plan (which is the next step). Canada has adopted specific National Physical Activity Guidelines and National Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines and F/P/T Health and Sport Physical Activity and Recreation (SPAR) Ministers have agreed upon national 2015 physical activity targets.

The 2011 National Recreation Summit, an event jointly hosted by F/P/T governments represented by the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council (ISRC) and the recreation field through the CPRA, triggered a process to develop a National Recreation Agenda which would be presented to the F/P/T Ministers in 2014. That process is not complete, and its content and format is unknown, but it may include elements of vision, policy, and strategy, and could include goals and some initial implementation steps. This Discussion Paper is a step in that direction.

The Canadian Sport Policy is a federal government led, sport sector policy endorsed by both senior levels of government outlining a 10-year vision for sport development. It includes elements of vision, goals, objectives, and policy, but has little in the way of strategy to implement it (which will follow); allowing various players to contribute in parallel in a variety of ways. The most recent iteration of that policy was prepared in 2011-2012.

In June, 2012, the F/P/T SPAR Ministers approved the 2012 Canadian Sport Policy. At the same meeting, the Ministers received the Active Canada 20/20 Strategy, and supported steps to proceed with development of an implementation plan for it. They also received a Report on the National Recreation Summit and supported subsequent steps to complete the National Recreation Agenda process by 2014.

Subsequent to the June 2012 Ministers meeting, the Deputy Ministers of those ministries asked that the three policies/agendas/strategies (i.e. Active Canada 20/20, Canadian Sport Policy, and National Recreation Agenda) be aligned in some way at a May 2013 National Recreation Roundtable in New Brunswick because of the overlap of delegates who might be representing each jurisdiction at that event and because of the significant shared support of the content of the three strategies/agendas/policies.

At their August 2013 meeting, the F/P/T SPAR Ministers are expecting a progress report on the development of the National Recreation Agenda, including progress in the coordination of existing strategies and policies between the three streams (i.e. Active Canada 20/20, Canadian Sport Policy, and National Recreation Agenda).

This document is meant to anchor discussions at a May 2013 National Recreation Roundtable, which is one step along the process of developing a National Recreation Agenda. That event will also explore the alignment of any shared initiatives between the three streams of effort. All participants at the 2013 National Recreation Roundtable are expected to have read this paper before attending and be prepared to discuss the points raised herein.
1. BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

To better understand the compelling need for a National Recreation Agenda, it is worthwhile taking a brief excursion back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries to examine several social reform movements that ultimately gave birth to public recreation and parks services in Canada.

19th Century Social Reform Movements

During the years from 1885 to 1914, described as an era of social reform in Canada, middle class philanthropists, clergymen, educators, businessmen, members of a variety of professions - and, most importantly, their spouses – set out to improve the conditions of industrial workers and their families in the tenements and slums of Canada’s cities and towns. By way of social movements later dubbed collectively as the Civilizing Mission to the Poor, they set out to eradicate poverty, disease, crime, alcoholism, pollution and prostitution in our urban-industrial neighborhoods.

The first of these movements in time was the Physical Culture Movement which came about in response to a perceived lack of physical fitness among members of the privileged and emerging middle classes of industrial society, who were said to be suffering from “diseases of affluence” arising from sedentary lifestyles. Various exercise systems were promoted to combat these “diseases”, often drawn from military training regimens and medical calisthenics. By the late 19th century physical exercise had become closely linked to recreation, education, competitive sport, and a variety of social and religious causes. In the latter case, it gave rise to the notion of Muscular Christianity and was linked to the development of such organizations as the YMCA.

The second was the City Beautiful Movement which was dominated by architects, landscape architects and urban social reformers who advocated civic beautification to enhance quality of life and eliminate social ills in North American cities. By planning cities to include tree-lined boulevards and spacious parks, the movement hoped to remove much that was dangerous and unsightly in industrial cities and towns. Put simply, it was an attempt to bring the best features of the natural environment and the countryside into the city by planting trees and building parks so as to enhance the quality of urban life.

The third was the Playground Movement, begun by the National Council of Women to promote the cause of vacation schools and summer playgrounds in order to improve the lives of working class children in industrial cities and towns. The supervised playgrounds that the Council advocated were intended to be substitutes for children’s unorganized and often dangerous play in city streets.

Each of these three movements came about in response to a compelling need identified by its adherents. Awareness of an increasing lack of physical fitness among the prosperous classes of industrial society arising from increasingly sedentary lifestyles gave rise to the Physical Culture Movement. A concern about the deteriorating quality of urban life and perceived lack of access to natural settings in the rapidly growing industrial cities and towns was integral to the City Beautiful Movement. And an observed lack of opportunities for healthy play among children in urban-industrial areas drove the Playground Movement.


2. A COMPELLING NEED TODAY

Investments in both public and private recreation services have grown dramatically over the past several decades in Canada. Spending on private sector experiences, equipment, and infrastructure has matured to the point where extensive opportunities are available for anyone with the means to pursue them. Investments in public recreation services, primarily at the local government level, have grown to the point where municipal parks and recreation is now one of the largest of municipal government departments, with net spending of tax dollars averaging well over $100 per capita across the country, and many communities spending many hundreds of dollars per capita each year.

However, in spite of this impressive level of spending, with many municipalities and the not-for-profit sector across the country providing leadership and implementing cutting edge programs, services, and spaces, there are still many challenges facing the field as follows:

1. **Perceived as a “soft service”** – although public recreation services have grown substantially in relation to other public services, the notion, summarized in the 1987 Recreation Statement, that public recreation services represent a right, and “are as essential as public education or health services”, is not a reality in many segments of our society. The field is still too often seen as a “soft” service; a service that is considered as a frill or a “nice to have” instead of as an effective social utility with high social returns and substantial benefits to the communities it serves.

2. **Fragmentation of efforts and resources** – In part because of the corresponding lack of a conceptual nexus of support for recreation as a solution to compelling local issues, other efforts and initiatives have emerged to address the same issues in parallel. For example, two decades ago, there was no established field called Active Living. It has emerged as a parallel field to recreation and is seen, in many provinces and territories, as a solution to health issues connected to sedentary lifestyles that recreation has been dealing with for decades, but has never been seen to credibly resolve. Similarly, in many communities, parallel departments of cultural services and parks services, have sprung up, as if culture, sport, parks, fitness and recreation were not all parts of a whole that share public goals and markets. If the various parallel fields can collaborate with a single united voice, they will all be more effective.

---

**The Intent of the 2011 National Recreation Summit**

This first event of its kind was intended to bring together representatives of Canada's three levels of government and its national, provincial and territorial recreation and parks associations, as well as other invited stakeholders collectively representing a broad cross section of the recreation field. Its purpose is to examine and discuss challenges and opportunities facing public recreation (including parks) so as to enhance the impact of recreation services at the national, provincial/territorial, and municipal levels. It would help set the agenda for the recreation field in Canada for the next generation. The event was intended to be the beginning of an ongoing dialogue, not an end. It is hoped that it will be the start of a regular mechanism for discourse and consultation.

*Source: the Brochure soliciting participants for the 2011 National Recreation Summit at Lake Louise Alberta*
3. **Rising health challenges** – While the recreation field tries to position itself as a response to increasing sedentary lifestyles, and a force operating against the decline in physical activity levels, it is difficult to demonstrate that the field has made significant progress on this front based on its traditional approach and mandate. While investments in public recreation have increased dramatically, the problems of sedentary lifestyles have only gotten worse. Declining physical literacy among children and youth results in inability to move with competence and confidence in a wide variety of physical activities such as sport. Rising apprehension about physical literacy, the work-leisure balance in modern life and an increasingly “plugged in” youth sector are all part of this challenge.

4. **Aging infrastructure** – In many ways, recreation is the victim of its own successes in the past fifty years. With expanding budgets, and massive investments in new recreation complexes that are now approaching the end of their functional lifespan, resources are not sufficient to reinvest in these assets which cost more to operate each year.

5. **Moving upscale** – Again, the field may be the victim of its own success, although success at possibly the wrong things. While it started on the margins of society, ensuring that those who couldn’t afford private sector opportunities for healthy lifestyles, the huge investment in public facilities was followed by mounting pressure to fill them and then still greater pressure to reduce their operating deficits. This led the field progressively upscale, serving all those with the means to pay high fees to use the spaces, with the original focus on those with few means sometimes lost in the race to the bottom. The result is an increasing concern about widening disparities in individual and family access to recreation opportunities and resources.

6. **Demographic shifts in population** – While the roots of the field are anchored in a child focussed paradigm, Canadian communities have changed, and many have a declining proportion of children and an increasing proportion of elderly adults. Also, communities are influenced by significant populations of immigrants from countries where public recreation is not so widely experienced or understood. The field hasn’t always responded well to these changes in community makeup and dynamics.

7. **Climate change** – Climate change is only recently causing a significant impact on community recreation systems; especially in the areas of seasonal special events, extreme weather events, and seasonal activities. One study\(^1\) summarizes that Canada should expect, on average, one more day of golf each year and one less day of skiing for the next 30 years; a dramatic shift in one generation. A natural environment under stress from rising public pressures and shrinking forests, endangered species, over-use of parks, the ecological impacts of growing consumerism are all part of this challenge.

---

**The Cornerstones of a National Recreation Agenda**

In short, the need for, and the principal purpose of, a National Recreation Agenda is to improve the ability of public recreation and parks agencies to maintain and enhance the public good by strengthening individual and family wellness, building and enriching communities, and nurturing environmental sustainability. In addition, though this is not a primary objective, public recreation services often promote economic activity and foster material prosperity.

---

2.1 Public Health Burden and Health Inequities
Current research suggests generally that there is dramatic polarization at each end of a continuum of health of Canadian citizens and communities. Some inner city neighbourhoods have become largely dysfunctional. And, many smaller, usually remote communities are also in crisis. While highly educated, high income citizens congregate at one end of the health continuum, poorly educated citizens from dysfunctional, low income families congregate at the other end of the continuum.

The health of individuals and the health of communities are inextricably tied together and both are connected to the environment in which they exist. It is difficult to have the health of any one without the other two, and progress on one almost certainly leads to progress on the others. However, often, health of the individual takes precedence in the public sector, and our health care system focusses on acute health care almost exclusively.

While recreation has recently been increasingly tied to health care agency partners, and a focus on individual health is important, it should not be supported at the expense of not focusing on health of communities and our environments. All three are tied together.

It is, therefore, extremely important for the public recreation systems in Canada to focus on all three, as no other field is as well positioned to do so.

2.2 Economic Performance versus Community Wellbeing

Gross Domestic Product
A country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measures the total economic output produced within its borders - whether produced by that country’s own local firms or by foreign firms. It has long been a measure of a country’s economic health and prosperity, and sometimes used to indicate a standard of living. Quite simply, it has been assumed that when GDP is rising, the quality of life is also rising.

But GDP does not measure many things associated with quality of life: how many people have jobs and how many do not; whether we live in safe and vital communities or substandard, crime-threatened and dangerous neighborhoods; the value of volunteering; whether or not residents have ready access to leisure time and recreation opportunities; and how efficient, effective and satisfying are our educational and health services.

On the other hand, GDP often does include measures of spending on items that patently decrease quality of life: tobacco production and consumption; illicit drugs; wars and other conflicts; toxic waste disposal; and more. Put simply, GDP measures changing economic performance, but tells us little or nothing about the quality of the communities in which we pursue our daily lives.

The Canadian Index of Wellbeing
The recently developed Canadian Index of Wellbeing\(^2\), published in 2011, attempts to redress some of the problems caused by the singular use of GDP to measure advances in quality of life. It defines wellbeing as:

\(^2\) Canadian Index of Wellbeing  https://uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing/wellbeing-canada/what-wellbeing
The presence of the highest possible quality of life in its full breadth of expression, focused on but not necessarily exclusive to: good living standards, robust health, a sustainable environment, vital communities, an educated populace, balanced time use, high levels of democratic participation, and access to and participation in leisure and culture.

In short, individual, family, community and environmental wellbeing are based on much more than simple indicators of economic production and consumption and rising incomes.

The Canadian Index of Wellbeing provides an index for each of these domains, based on measures of a variety of indicators for each. More specifically, it charts how each index has changed over the 15-year period from 1994 to 2008.

Overall, wellbeing in Canada improved for five of the eight domains between 1994 and 2008: Community Vitality, Democratic Engagement, Education, Healthy Populations, and Living Standards. It declined for three domains: Environment, Leisure and Culture, and Time Use. This decline in itself is an important reason for a National Recreation Agenda that includes priorities, roles and responsibilities and coordinated strategies.

3. DEFINITION OF PUBLIC RECREATION

In order to respond to the need for an agenda, the field must first agree on a definition of recreation; or at least public recreation.

There are many definitions of recreation available to the field. However, the only definition that has any “weight” is one embedded in the 1987 National Recreation Statement which was endorsed by all provinces and territories, the federal government, and the field itself through the national and provincial/territorial recreation associations. While that statement, and the definition and roles within it, are remarkably relevant twenty-five years later, the definition could use some updating.

Amendments to the definition have been discussed across Canada since the National Recreation Summit. A candidate for a revised definition is as follows:

Recreation includes all those activities in which an individual chooses to participate, and includes sports, physical recreation programs, artistic and creative expressions, social and intellectual activities. Recreation is a fundamental human need and right and is essential to the psychological, social and physical well-being of each Canadian.

Recreation is also an essential social service which has a three pronged purpose:

Definition of Public Recreation

... Recreation includes all those activities in which an individual chooses to participate in their leisure time, and is not confined solely to sports or physical recreation programs, but includes artistic, creative, cultural, social and intellectual activities, and ... is a fundamental human need for individuals of all ages and interests and for both sexes and is essential to the psychological, social and physical wellbeing of each Canadian;

(Also,) ... recreation is an essential social service in the same way that health and education are considered as social services, and that recreation’s purpose should be (a) to assist individual and community development, and (b) to improve the quality of life, and (c) to enhance social functioning.

Source: Adapted from the 1987 National Recreation Statement
- *Citizen building*
- *Community building*
- *Environmental sustainability*

However, the recreation field is not restricted to “discretionary” time. As it shifts from being output focused to outcome focused (see section 5.2.1) it becomes more concerned with using recreation as a vehicle for achieving specific socially worthwhile goals and objectives, and that means that it recognizes fewer boundaries in achieving them. So, for example, physical activity is supported regardless of whether it occurs during discretionary time, or at work, or at school, or in utilitarian ways like active transportation.

Essentially, the recreation field is built on three cornerstones which act as drivers for policy and decision making. All are important and interdependent. Each is a vitally essential part of the Canadian reality as summarized in *Figure One*.

**Figure One**  
The Three Cornerstones of Recreation

However, when one looks at the field in terms of the Benefits it produces, the three legged stool becomes a four legged chair, with the addition of Economic Benefits, as illustrated in *Figure Two*.

**Figure Two**  
The Four Categories of Outcomes of Recreation
The distinction between the three cornerstones and the four categories of benefits is important. While delivering economic benefit is not a primary driver for service delivery decisions, it is most definitely an outcome. Recreation services and spaces assist greatly in reducing health care, social service and justice costs, thereby contributing to the state of the economy. They also create a significant amount of diverse economic activity, as evidenced by the sport tourism policies and cultural tourism strategies that have become popular in Canadian municipalities. A report from the Conference Board of Canada\(^3\) indicated that in 2004, the total amount that Ontario households spent on sport alone was estimated to be $8.9 billion. This compares to total consumer spending in 2004 in Ontario of $322 billion. Such spending creates jobs, fosters tourism, and renders communities more attractive places in which to live, work and invest.

All recreation activity and investment needs to be couched in terms of standard cost/benefit analysis which includes, but is not restricted to, the economic benefits to the community. However, if recreation were to include economic development as a principal driver to decision making, it would set up an inherent conflict with the three cornerstones that drive it. Any recreation practitioner can pre-empt socially worthwhile services in favour of delivering more revenue, but that is not what the public recreation field is about.

In the public sector, when measuring all costs and benefits, the units of measurement for costs and benefits are considerably different than when such analysis is applied to the private sector.

4. **A VISION FOR THE RECREATION FIELD**

The field also requires a galvanizing vision; one that can drive effort, clarify intent, unify thinking, and act as a foundation for planning and justifying decisions. There are many candidates for such a vision. One is the vision that emerged in the mid 1990’s that is captured in the 1997 Benefits Catalogue.

Another comes from the work at the Summit. The vision from the Summit deserves further consideration as follows.

A **Canada in which all citizens are involved in meaningful, accessible recreation experiences that foster:**

- Mental and physical health and wellbeing and a self-confident, competent, contributing community citizen;
- Communities which are healthy, inclusive, welcoming, resilient, and sustainable;
- Natural environments which are appreciated nurtured and sustained.

---

\(^3\) from a pre-published manuscript of a report called Strengthening Ontario: The Socio-Economic Benefits of Participation in Amateur Sports in Ontario, prepared by the Conference Board of Canada for the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, March 2013
5. A STRATEGIC APPROACH: FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS

Section Three defines the recreation field and Section Four provides a vision for it. This section provides a values base on which the field is built. What is important is for the field to be focussed and consistent with those values in all it does.

5.1 On Being Intentional: A Values/Principles Foundation

One of the recreation field’s most important values base is the evolution of the Benefits Based Approach to decision making. That work is articulated in the National Benefits Hub available at [http://benefitshub.ca](http://benefitshub.ca) and won’t be repeated herein, except to summarize the eight key benefits themes which must anchor all public policy work and national initiatives with respect to the field. They are:

1. Recreation, Sport, Arts, Culture and Parks are ESSENTIAL TO PERSONAL HEALTH - Physical activity is a key determinant of health status.
2. Recreation, Sport, Arts, Culture and Parks are all keys to balanced HUMAN DEVELOPMENT - helping Canadians reach for their potential.
3. Recreation, Fitness, Sport, Arts, Culture and Parks/Greenspace are essential to QUALITY OF LIFE AND PLACE.
4. Recreation, Sport, Arts and Outdoor Pursuits reduce self-destructive and ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR.
5. Recreation, Sport, Arts, Culture and Parks build STRONG FAMILIES and HEALTHY COMMUNITIES.
6. PAY NOW or PAY MORE LATER! Recreation, Sport, Arts, Culture and Parks reduce health care, social service, and police/justice costs!
7. Recreation, Sport, Art, Culture and Parks are significant ECONOMIC GENERATORS in your community!
8. Parks, open spaces, and natural areas are 'Greenspace' essential to WELL BEING and our ENVIRONMENTAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL SURVIVAL.

5.2 Positioning Public Recreation Field

The public recreation field is broad, deep and diverse. But all of it receives public funding and support directly or indirectly. As such, it must be seen within the context of delivering public good. That can be articulated under the following three positioning statements.

5.2.1 Outcome Driven

Publicly supported recreation services can only be justified if they benefit in some way all taxpayers; those that benefit directly through use of the recreation service, and those that benefit indirectly through the achievement of some socially important goals or objectives. In
other words, publicly sponsored recreation services are not justified or evaluated on the basis of direct benefit to users, but on the indirect benefit to all citizens regardless of whether they use the service or not. When public recreation purports to be “customer focussed” or “customer driven” the customer is the taxpayer underwriting some of the costs, as opposed to the user of the services.

Therefore, the foundation for all decisions concerning public recreation services is the effective delivery of public goods; the delivery of indirect benefit to all citizens (from which they cannot escape). These public goods are essentially the public benefits which have been widely published and reported elsewhere but include many specific benefits under the headings of citizen building, community building and environmental sustainability. And, as has been articulated in Section Two, there are also many spinoff benefits under a fourth heading; economic sustainability.

5.2.2 Inclusive in Every Way

Public recreation was founded on the margins of society; originally focussed on serving those members of the community that could not easily gain access to recreation benefits in any other way; those with barriers to participation. Public recreation originally was set up to ensure that children who couldn’t afford to go away to summer camp, had an opportunity in the city to attend a low cost day camp. It was set up originally to serve families that were not members of the local country club or golf club; families that couldn’t afford recreation opportunities provided by the private sector.

As more resources were allocated to public recreation and it grew out of its roots, it broadened to serve middle class Canadian families and communities. As larger facilities were built, pressure was brought to bear to fill them. As their budgets grew, and as operating deficits increased, more and more pressure evolved to increase recovery rates; the portion of costs paid by users. That took the service more “upscale” progressively serving more and more of those with resources, often at the expense of those with fewer resources that no longer felt welcome, comfortable or able to participate in public recreation services.

Moving forward, the field must ensure that it does not exclude those with barriers to participation. In fact, serving citizens faced with barriers to participating in public recreation services is more effective than serving those with means to recreate outside the public sector. Helping marginalized citizens to grow and feel connected to their community and to increase their sense of wellbeing, is actually a higher return on public investment than serving a person with no barriers, who is already healthy and can get access to services through non-profit or private providers.

It is not good enough to make opportunities available and passively hope that citizens will use them. Public recreation must more proactively incent and encourage those on the margins of society to use the services in a way that will help build skills, health, well-being and a sense of confidence and competence.

All this does not mean that public recreation should not serve the middle or upper classes of Canadian communities. They have rights and deserve service also. However, it means that those with resources and abilities should not be served at the expense of serving others without.
5.2.3 Relevant and Compelling
The recreation field has to build a conceptual nexus of support within the communities it serves and those who decide on how public resources are to be allocated. It has to take a more deliberate and strategic approach to service delivery and demonstrate that it has effective responses to real and compelling social issues and problems if it is to garner any support. It is not THE answer to all social ills but it is an effective contributor to many.

Asking citizens what they want, and then giving them what they say they want because they say they want it is not a sound basis for planning recreation services or making decisions within the field. More strategically focusing limited available resources on contributing to real social issues and community needs in the minds of decision makers is a rational basis on which to plan and act.

5.3 Principles and Values
The recreation field has always been values driven. Decisions made at a local level are made within the direction provided by a moral compass that corresponds to public policy fundamentals. The following principles come from a document called “A Vision for the Parks and Recreation Field” which was signed by all provincial/territorial parks and recreation associations at the 2005 Canadian Parks and Recreation Association’s annual conference in Edmonton.

5.3.1 Recreation is a Right
Everyone in Canada has the right to enjoy quality parks and recreation services. The field ensures high standards of excellence in ensuring that right. One focus of a municipal recreation department is to involve people from an early age and throughout their lives, guiding healthy lifestyle development.

5.3.2 Involved Communities/Co-creating/Authentic Community Development
The field is committed to supporting Canada’s community-minded citizens, who use their knowledge, skills and resident awareness to fill essential roles in advocacy, stewardship groups, advisory councils and building partnerships. Co-creating better community futures through community development approaches is fundamental to success. Real community development is a “bottom up” process but requires leadership, understanding and nurturing.

5.3.3 Healthy Communities – to Live and Grow
Recreation’s partners and community champions work as a team to provide innovative ways to improve the quality of life for all Canadians. Activities include:

- social inclusion initiatives,
- environmental issues,
- beautification of parks and open spaces,
- multi-use trails and pathways,
- community development,
- increasing physical activity,
- quality infrastructure and facilities.

5.3.4 Access for All
Eliminating barriers that block participation is vital to the goal of becoming truly inclusive. The needs of all people must be met, regardless of age, ability, ethnic diversity or circumstance. The advantages of being involved in parks and recreation activities and services must be accessible to everyone everywhere. But it is not sufficient to remove
Proactive initiatives to involve marginalized segments of communities are required to ensure a more equitable approach to service delivery. Treating people equitably does not mean treating everyone the same.

5.3.5 Environmental Leadership
All Canadians are stewards of our land, water and air quality. Achieving results requires education, awareness, commitment and involvement. Activities include:
- regenerating our forests;
- reducing chemical use in our green spaces;
- developing environmentally friendly facilities;
- actively caring for our parks, horticulture and forests.

6. A BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION

6.1 Guiding Policy and Governance
The 1987 National Recreation Statement represents the clearest manifestation of how various levels of government come together to form an integrated system for recognizing the recreation field as an effective social utility in Canada and an essential social service. It is quite remarkable how relevant the twenty-five year old statement is in the current reality. However, it needs to be updated and refreshed, and a recommitment to it is required by all levels of government.

6.2 Community Building: The First Cornerstone
Communities can progress through stages of evolution along a continuum. Community members first develop a feeling of being welcome and becoming a part of a community. Then they can proceed to developing a sense of community identify, spirit, pride, and finally a unique community culture. But that evolution, which happens, in large part, through recreation activities, is not automatic. It requires leadership and intentional nurturing. That is the role of community recreation agencies.

6.2.1 Reframing/Repurposing of Physical and Social Infrastructure
Much of the built infrastructure in Canada has been assessed by provincial recreation associations and has been deemed to be approaching the end of its functional lifespan. Important decisions need to be made about which elements of the infrastructure need to be retrofitted and renewed, which elements need to be expanded, and which need to be replaced with different elements that more appropriately respond to future needs.
Communities need financial support from senior levels of government for the reinvestment that is required.

Discussion Point #4
How can the field resource the needed major new investments in infrastructure to ensure a physical base is available in which to host needs meeting recreation services?

While each community is unique and national standards of facility supply are likely not relevant, there is much that communities can learn from each other about the planning, development and operation of recreation spaces. That indicates coordination on a provincial and national level that includes sharing of research, best practices, successes, technologies, and trends.

6.2.2 Community Settings Design/Redesign
One of the roles that community recreation departments play is in supporting community planning and design. Local recreation agencies across Canada are involved in ensuring communities evolve as safe, active, creative, accessible ways. The recreation field supports Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles, active transportation, community school hubs, central gathering places, green infrastructure and the strategic use of public art. These activities must continue to be areas of focus for the field.

6.2.3 Community Capacity Building and Animation
Communities and their capacity for development are based on local volunteers who lead and follow and create a fabric within which citizens can live, work, invest and play in harmony. However, volunteering is changing in Canada. It needs careful nurturing and guidance for it to evolve in a positive way. The details of that evolution will vary by community, but there are some aspects of volunteerism that are fundamental to the concept.

In addition to volunteerism, there are other aspects of community development that are currently, and must continue to be areas of emphasis for the recreation field. They include:

- Facilitating Social Networks and Connectivity;
- Fostering Local Leaders/Community Resourcefulness;
- Fostering of Citizenship and Community Engagement;
- Time-banking and Volunteerism;
- Special Attention: Aboriginal/Isolated Communities.

Discussion Point #5
How can the field better share and build on successful experiences with community capacity building?
6.3 Citizen building: The Second Cornerstone

6.3.1 Investing in Early Childhood

Investing in early childhood development has the greatest return on public investment as those investments are returned over decades of healthier, more productive citizens. The vehicle that is most age appropriate for our youngest citizens is play. There are many strategies and initiatives in various stages of development across the country that might benefit from more collaboration and cooperation. They include:

- Play Workers Initiative;
- Community Play Strategies;
- Quality Assurance – HIGH FIVE;

Discussion Point #6
Is a National Play Strategy required which deals with the importance of unstructured play and connecting children to nature?

6.3.2 Cultural Shifts and Program Innovation/Priorities

After-School Recreation

Various studies show how the fifteen hours each week from 3 to 6pm each weekday offer the most opportunity for school aged children to engage in antisocial activities and learn antisocial behaviour. Most recreation departments are developing after school initiatives in partnership with other community agencies, but more coordination nationally on promising practices, measures of effectiveness and communicating benefits would help the field.

Discussion Point #7
How can the field share and support successful After-School Initiatives designed to focus on the periods of time when young people have the least amount of family supervision?

Sport for Life

Community public recreation, like community education deals with individuals from entry level to the highest levels of achievement. That achievement can be in areas of arts, sport, leaders, or advocacy, and all are part of citizen and community building.

While the highest levels of sport and art are less the realm of most municipal recreation departments, they sometimes use local public facilities and always develop leaders and mentors that have application in citizen development.

Active Living and Active Aging

The recreation field shares and supports almost all of the Physical Activity Movement’s direction and goals embedded in the Active Canada 20/20 Strategy. However, in some provinces there is duplication between the two fields and gaps between them. A closer working relationship will help each other.
Arts and Culture Renaissance

The health and wellness of citizens can’t just rely on physical activity and physical recreation opportunities. Nurturing creativity and skills in the arts and heritage also help to build well rounded citizens. But there is a trend in many communities to separate arts and culture from recreation and this trend needs to be reversed.

Discussion Point #9
How can the recreation field better position itself as inclusive of arts and culture, not necessarily being the primary delivery agent in each community, but certainly embracing the field as within the scope of recreation and an excellent vehicle to use in cost effectively delivering benefits to communities?

6.4 Environmental Sustainability: The Third Cornerstone

6.4.1 Greening Communities – Bringing Nature to People
Canadians are much less likely to spend time in natural wilderness settings and those that do spend much less time on average in those settings.

Discussion Point #10
How can the field strategize to bring nature into the urban experience in ways that expose urban citizens to the wonder of ecosystems and teaches ecological stewardship?

6.4.2 Healthy Parks, Healthy People – National Urban Parks Program
If Canadians aren’t going to spend so much time in nature, then urban parks must become a larger part of their lives.

Discussion Point #11
How can the field resource an enhanced urban parks program that will deliver important public health, ecological and social development benefits?

6.4.3 Nature Literacy and Environmental Education
The recreation field needs to focus on nature literacy and using exposure to natural environments and ecosystems as a vehicle to citizen development. Partnerships with local not-for-profit agencies and educational institutions will leverage the effectiveness of the work.
6.4.4 National/Provincial/Territorial Parks, Trails and Waterways
Canada’s system of national, provincial and territorial parks, trails and waterways represent an exceptional national asset that acts as a public open space model at the national level for the recreation field to emulate locally; a coordinated system that benefits all Canadians both directly (through use) and indirectly (through environmental and heritage sustainability) that allows each province to adopt its own unique approach while still operating in parallel.

6.5 Economic Development and Diversification
Public recreation must be seen as an investment, rather than a cost, or a frill. Using recreation as a vehicle for citizen building, community building and environmental sustainability can and does effectively attract investment, reduce social service, justice and health costs, make communities a more attractive place to invest, and supports aligned local industries that benefit directly. In fact, taking away from public recreation to invest in economic development may be counterproductive.

6.6 Recreation Sector Innovation, Research and Knowledge Management

6.6.1 Making Tactical Use of Science
Fundamental to being relevant and compelling is the intentional use of research to make points and build a conceptual nexus of support for the outcomes that drive the recreation field. Evidence based decisions are the best decisions.

6.6.2 Centre(s) of Excellence Scheme – Community Recreation
There is a need across the country for a network of Centres of Excellence operating in alignment within a Pan Canadian recreation research agenda; each acting as a hub of knowledge interface between elements of the field. These centres should each be involved, to varying degrees, in such areas as:

- Coordination of research;
- Exchange of information between those that have it and those that don’t;
- Formatting and packaging of information into progressively more useful forms;
- Cataloguing of promising practices and compelling stories designed to effect the conceptual nexus of support;
- Developing conceptual models for use in the field;
- Coordinating provincial systems of professional development for the field;
- Coordinating efforts and initiatives between the recreation field and other allied fields within the Quality of Life Sector.

Such a coordinated network has to be linked to organizations like The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Institute and the Sport Information Research Centre.

6.6.3 Leisure Information Network – Adding to the Information and Evidence Base
The Leisure Information Network is an excellent example of provinces taking national leadership to develop and maintain a resource whose value is easily leveraged across the country and has become a tremendous asset to the field. LIN should be supported nationally as a “one stop shopping” information hub for the field. It should be attached to one of the above Centres of Excellence and Innovation, but would continue to serve the field nationally.
6.6.4 Benefits Research/Hub
In the same way LIN provides knowledge exchange generally for the field in Canada, the Benefits Hub was developed by a single province and now has tremendous value as the focal point of information exchange for the narrower, but extremely important “benefits movement” within the field. While it may continue to be based in and supported by one province, its scope and use can and should be broadened, with such expansion commensurate with additional support from other provinces and territories or national entities.

6.6.5 National Leisure Research: Priority Knowledge Gaps/Applied Research Areas
A national research and knowledge gap agenda is essential to future success of the field. And, the field doesn’t have to start from scratch. A coordinated research agenda has been developed in partnership with researchers and practitioners and can be updated periodically. But a system is needed to ensure that happens.

Discussion Point #12
How can the field better coordinate systems of knowledge development and transfer, putting relevant information into the hands of those who need it in more useful formats?

6.6.6 Professionalization and Skills Training: National Certification
Coordination of systems of professional development and national recognition of certifications of ability and competence would greatly assist the field and allow for more seamless labour market practices.

Discussion Point #13
Is it time to reconsider nationally coordinated professional development and certification systems for the field to improve the field’s leadership?

6.6.7 “Recreation for Life” Marketing
Marketing strategies and materials are costly to develop and there are economies of scale in their use. Therefore, they are very subject to national coordination, where messages developed in one jurisdiction and found to be effective can be used in other jurisdictions.

Discussion Point #14
How can the field leverage existing and revised systems of marketing messages and strategies to ensure the benefits of recreation activity are more clearly understood?

There is a significant role for ParticipACTION to play in this regard.

6.6.8 Service Excellence and Promoting Promising Practice
Continuous improvements in recreation service excellence, primarily focussed on improving the standard of service delivery at the community level, is warranted. Such service excellence will foster improvements while recognizing that each community is unique.
### 6.6.9 Establishing Performance Monitoring Processes and Indicators

A great deal of work needs to be done on developing performance measures for the field. If the field is to become relevant and compelling it must demonstrate how it contributes to public goods and how effective it is at achieving them. Measuring costs and benefits and applying them in sound decision making frameworks is fundamental to the future of the field. It is also fundamental to obtaining funding from the public and private sectors.

While there is much that can be done independently, collaboration on measures is also required. For example, ways of building on the Canadian Index of Well Being with deeper penetration into the indicators of success for the field is required.

### 7. FORGING AHEAD

#### 7.1 Building a Bigger Tent

The recreation field must build connections with other fields and professional disciplines within the Quality of Life Sector for synergistic results. The first step will be to prioritize other fields within that Sector. These other fields don’t always see the connection with recreation and some, while part of the field, don’t realize the shared mandates and markets in which all interact. These allied fields include:

- Health promotion
- Fitness
- Landscape architecture
- Physical activity
- Environmental sustainability
- Sport
- Urban planning
- Arts and culture
- Public policy
- Education
- Justice systems and policing
- Social and Community services.

#### 7.2 Collaborative Initiatives

An effective National Recreation Agenda process will be aligned with, and illustrate common ground with, the Active Canada 20/20 Strategy and the 2012 Canadian Sport Policy. Much work needs to be done, including:

- First, align levels of government;
- Then align Public/Private/Voluntary Sector;
- Finally, Inter-sectoral Dialogue/Alignment.
7.3 Interactive Communications Strategy
Whatever form the final version of this National Recreation Agenda takes, its success rests entirely on it being seen to be a Pan Canadian framework for moving the field forward with support from all levels of government, and all P/T Recreation Associations. That doesn’t mean that every province and territory will take have the same priorities for implementing the Agenda, nor does it mean that they will adopt similar strategies for implementing it. However, general endorsement will support parallel efforts at progress.

7.4 A Unifying Structure for the Field
All of the above strategies are much less possible without a strong unifying national structure which is well resourced and well positioned.

At present the CPRA is the umbrella that binds the field nationally through its network of provincial and territorial recreation associations. However, it doesn’t have the organizational capacity to do what is required to move the final National Recreation Agenda forward. Even through partners (see the next section) insufficient capacity is currently available to provide leadership on all the challenges and issues in this discussion paper.

Discussion Point #17
How can the field develop the strength and capacity to do all that needs to be done to move the National Recreation Agenda forward?

There is much for the field in general, and CPRA in particular, needs to do. Some important steps are outlined in the next section.

7.5 Strategic Alliances, Mechanisms and Leadership

7.5.1 ISRC/CPRA Partnership/Secretariat
The most important sector/governmental relationships for the field exist from the P/T level downward where the services are sponsored and delivered. However, more national level contact and relationship is required.

Members of ISRC and its committees all have full time jobs and agendas aside from their ISRC roles. Members of CPRA also have responsibilities at multiple levels of volunteer involvement. While they need to correspond and liaise over many of the issues in this agenda, the members themselves can’t do the day to day work of maintaining that relationship. A small, staffed secretariat is warranted to act on behalf of those two entities to ensure the relationship fulfills the potential that is outlined herein.

7.5.2 A System of National Recreation and Parks Conferences and Regional Forums/Exchanges
There is a need for annual national level conferences or forums for information exchange and coordination of policy and research initiatives. They need to align sport, physical activity and recreation efforts, and the inter-relationship between the federal and provincial/territorial governments and recreation associations. These events do not supplant or replace the need for regional and/or provincial/territorial conferences or events.
7.5.3 **FCM Partnership**
An alliance with the Federation of Municipalities is one of the most important partnerships that the field needs to foster. This will be the focus of the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, with support of its P/T members. The alliance will not only ensure that those elected and hired to make decisions in Canadian municipalities understand how recreation should be positioned as a social utility, and an essential social service, but all of its potential contribution to the health and well-being of all citizens, communities and environments in Canada.

7.6 **Align Resources**
There are many areas where the public good that results from public recreation services overlaps the goals and mandates of the private sector. In many communities, private providers of recreation service work in tandem with the public sector to deliver services. But many other examples of overlapping mandates will be evident over time. For example, as measures of recreation contribution to human health and well-being are refined, there is potential for health insurance companies to financially support public recreation.

8. **SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION POINTS**
The seventeen discussion points can be considered within the three cornerstones of the field and under four broad headings as summarized in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Building</th>
<th>Citizen Building</th>
<th>Environmental Sustainability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Laying the Foundational Elements</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Agree on a Definition and Vision on which the field is built</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Agree on set of positioning statements, values and principles to guide the field</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Update and recommit to the responsibility/jurisdictional framework in the 1987 National Recreation Statement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agree on Specific Strategies Under the Three Cornerstones</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Coordination of community capacity building strategies</td>
<td>7. After School Initiatives</td>
<td>11. An enhanced urban parks program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Support the 2012 Sport Canada Policy and Active Canada 20/20 Strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Arts Initiatives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agree on Some Overarching Requirements to Anchor the Strategies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Better coordinated knowledge development, transfer and utilization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Better coordinated professional development and certification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Leverage the marketing messages about the benefits of recreation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Continuous improvement of recreation services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Much better capability to measure efficacy of public recreation services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Create the Right Structures and Initial Steps to Move Forward</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. A stronger, better resourced national structure to drive the Agenda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>