Active Abilities Canada



Municipal Guide for Disability Inclusion in Recreation and Physical Activity

Active Abilities Canada | December 3, 2025

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Introduction

This project is led by Active Abilities Canada, *formerly* known as the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability.

Active Abilities Canada was founded in 1989, following the Jasper Talks, a meeting of organizations and individuals committed to promoting physical activity, sports, and recreation for persons with disabilities. Active Abilities Canada has always been dedicated to promoting inclusivity and accessibility for people of all abilities. We strive to encourage participation in physical activity, sport, and recreation for the purposes of health, enjoyment, and social integration.

Active Abilities Canada would like to thank our funding partners: Federal-Provincial/Territorial Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Council (SPARC), and the Government of Canada

Thank you to our contributing partners on this project: Canadian Disability Participation Project (CDPP) 2.0, Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) and provincial and territorial affiliates

The steering committee for this project included:

- Amy Latimer-Cheung, PhD, Queen's University; Principal Investigator, Canadian Disability Participation Project 2.0
- Janet Lawson, PhD, University of Manitoba; Co-Investigator, Canadian Disability Participation Project 2.0
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- Alyssa Grimes, Queen's University
- Mike Arthur, Active Abilities Canada
- Taryn Barry, PhD, Active Abilities Canada
- Sarah Ane, Parks and Recreation Ontario

Acknowledgement of Indigenous People

We fully acknowledge the unique and enduring relations that exist between Indigenous Peoples and the lands on which municipalities across Canada are located. We encourage all users of this Guide to learn about the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples who have traditionally inhabited these lands.

While this Guide aims to help municipal recreational leaders in creating inclusive physical activities and recreational practices, it may not fully address the unique needs of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. We therefore urge users and municipal leaders to invest in building relations with local Indigenous communities to advance reconciliation.

Rights of Persons with Disabilities

This Guide was developed in consideration of Section 15 of ***The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms***, which states that every individual in Canada is to be considered equal, regardless of physical or mental disability, race, colour, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, or age.

In 2010, Canada ratified the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Article 30 states that persons with disabilities have the right to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sports on an equal footing with others.

Note on Intersectionality

This Guide was designed with an intersectional lens that recognizes persons with disabilities may have overlapping identities and be part of several marginalized communities that impact how they participate in recreation and physical activity.

Text Accessibility

This Guide is written in plain language. If it does not meet your accessibility needs, please contact us at **info@activeabilities.ca** and we will arrange accommodations for you.

Areas of Practices

This Guide is composed of eight evidence-informed areas of practice. These areas are listed and defined below.

Area	Definition
Programming	Municipal recreation programming that is inclusive allows for persons with disabilities to fully participate and engage. It includes creating programming where everyone can join in, and providing information, products, services, and spaces that can be adapted to meet each person's unique needs.
Built Environment	Accessibility in municipal buildings and outdoor recreation spaces means designing them so that everyone can use them comfortably, no matter what kind of disability they might have. This includes thinking about people with physical (e.g., cerebral palsy, spinal cord injury, diabetes), sensory (e.g., low vision, hearing loss), or neurodiverse (e.g., attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia) needs.
Workplace Culture	Inclusive workplace culture is a system in organizations and municipal recreation departments that focuses on including persons with disabilities. This starts with leaders supporting the idea and continues through practices in human resources.
Communication	Effective, inclusive, and accessible communication by municipal recreation leaders and front-line staff helps break down barriers, making it easier for persons with disabilities to take part in both unstructured and structured recreation and physical activity programs.
Partnerships	Partnerships are key to creating inclusive, accessible recreation opportunities for everyone in the community, including persons with disabilities. Working with local organizations, advocates, and other government levels helps municipalities share resources, coordinate efforts, and change attitudes about disability. These relationships not only improve program quality but also make better use of existing community assets.

Area	Definition
Staff Training	Ongoing education and training helps municipal recreation staff at all levels develop the skills and confidence needed to deliver inclusive programs and services that welcome persons with disabilities. Effective staff training should be planned, partner-driven, and designed for real-world learning and autonomy.
Evaluation	Evaluating your programs helps you understand what works, where to grow, and how to make municipal recreation more inclusive for persons with disabilities. A solid evaluation makes decisions more transparent, ensures accountability, and leads to better, evidence-based programming.
Persuading Decision-Makers	Municipal recreation staff frequently need to get municipal council and senior managers on board with making activities inclusive and accessible for everyone. This usually means asking for funding, spaces, staff, and time to help break down barriers for persons with disabilities. Winning support takes time—you'll need strong communication, lasting relationships, and facts that show the value of inclusion.

Purpose of Guide

This Guide provides how-to strategies for staff at all levels in municipal recreation departments to make sure persons with disabilities are included in their programs and activities.

Target Audience

This Guide is for people who work in municipal government as directors of recreation and leisure services, program directors, managers, and coordinators. It may also be of use to persons with disabilities, those who deliver programs, municipal officials, caregivers, family and friends, and community groups when advocating for changes.

Rationale

Accessibility Legislation

Six provincial governments and the federal government have laws or are developing them to make sure places are accessible for persons with disabilities. These provinces include British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Saskatchewan. They require local governments to create plans to make all their services and spaces accessible. This Guide can help local governments meet or enhance the minimum standards set by their province. Municipal leaders should contact their province's accessibility directorates to learn more about the laws, standards and resources in their area.

Disability in Canada

The number of persons with disabilities in Canada is growing. It is estimated that about 850,000 children in Canada have a disability (Policy Options, 2023). The 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability found that 27% of Canadians who are over the age of 15 (about eight million people) have at least one disability that affects their daily activities (Statistics Canada, 2023). In addition, 42% of seniors, aged 65 years and older, had four or more coinciding disabilities, while pain related (68%), mobility (63%) and flexibility (59%) were the most common types of disabilities for this demographic (Statistics Canada, 2024).

Barriers to Participation

Persons with disabilities often have fewer chances to enjoy sports and activities compared to others. It has been found that persons with disabilities are less likely than those without disabilities to have participated in recreational activities or sports in the last 12 months (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2025) and twice as likely to be inactive than people without disabilities (Activity Alliance, 2024). This is because they face many barriers, such as physical, social, and emotional challenges (Martin Ginis et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2020; Arbour-Nicitopoulos et al., 2021). These barriers can make it hard for them to feel like they belong in their communities. Sometimes, they are excluded from regular recreation programs and have to participate in separate facilities (Dattilo et al., 2019; Mobily & Johnson, 2021).

A survey led by Engage Nova Scotia in 2019 found that persons with disabilities are much less likely to exercise regularly or use community facilities such as recreation centres and parks. They also find it harder to get to these places and often say that the cost of programs stops them from joining in.

Call to Change

Persons with disabilities want to enjoy recreational activities with their friends and family, or in places close to home. Researchers recommend that making recreational environments more inclusive is important. This means creating spaces where everyone can participate together, regardless of their abilities (Strumbo et al., 2011; Gallant et al., 2019).

National frameworks have also emphasized the importance of physical activity and recreation. For example, *A Common Vision for Increasing Physical Activity and Reducing Sedentary Living in Canada: Let's Get Moving* (2018) released by the federal, provincial and territorial Ministers responsible for sport, physical activity and recreation, is a policy framework and call to action to increase physical activity and reduce sedentary living. The Common Vision notes that communities and residents can work with persons living with physical, intellectual, sensory, behavioral, developmental, and other disabilities and those experiencing other challenges, including mental health problems and illnesses to address barriers to physical activity (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Physical Activity and Recreation Committee, 2018, p. 40).

In addition, the *Framework for Recreation in Canada*, was designed to stimulate coordinated policies and practices in recreation in provinces and territories. A goal of this framework is to increase inclusion and access to recreation for populations that face constraints to their participation (Canadian Parks and Recreation Association/ Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council, 2015). All provinces and territories endorsed the document, except for Quebec. In 2017, Quebec published the *Policy on Physical Activity, Sport, and Recreation: Quebecers on the Move!*, a policy that promotes physically active lifestyles for all Quebecers.

The Role of the Municipality

This Guide outlines the first set of practices for persons with disabilities since the Municipal Government Policy Guidelines (no longer in print) were published in 1991 by the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association with the assistance of Dr. Renée Lyons.

Across Canada, many municipalities provide recreational activities for all residents, including those with disabilities. This involves using Universal Design principles to make outdoor spaces accessible and training staff to support inclusion. By offering both structured and unstructured recreational opportunities, municipalities can help people feel a sense of belonging, enjoy activities, have choices, and feel free. This contributes to a better quality of life for everyone (Dattilo et al., 2019; Mobily & Johnson, 2021).

Municipal governments can play many important roles in making their communities vibrant and accessible. They can act as service providers, leaders, champions, partners, employers, investors, or conveners. This is because municipalities are close to people and can raise awareness about important social issues in their communities (Torjman & Leviten-Reid, 2003). In addition, municipalities must think about accessibility when designing new buildings, fixing parks or trails, planning land use, and setting up programs and services (NS Department of Justice, 2018; Kovac, 2019).

As more municipalities across Canada work toward these goals, this Guide offers helpful ideas and recommendations. These ideas can help reduce unnecessary work and improve the quality of recreational activities for everyone.

Methods

This Guide was created by listening to persons with disabilities, their caregivers, and municipal staff from all over Canada. It provides a genuine look at how well municipal recreation departments include persons with disabilities. We appreciate the time, personal experiences, and expertise that many people shared to help make this Guide.

Here is a more detailed explanation of how this Guide was developed:

Consensus Panel

In 2024, a group called the Consensus Panel was formed. This group included community representatives, municipal staff, researchers, and persons with disabilities. They met in person in Ottawa from September 24 to 25, 2024, and online numerous times in 2024 and 2025 to review the information collected and the various draft versions of the Guide. Between these meetings, the group was surveyed several times to gather more opinions and feedback on the Guide's purpose, evidence, and drafts. We appreciate the extensive time and expertise that the Consensus Panel members contributed to this project.

Consensus Panel Members

- **Alicia Souveny,** Individual with a Disability and Physiotherapist
- **Alynn Skalicky,** Municipal Expert and Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS), City of Regina
- **Dave Sora,** Co-Founder, Center for Accessible Sport and Play
- **Emily George,** Executive Director, Recreation Manitoba
- **Fowzi Hersi,** Policy Analyst, Public Health Agency of Canada
- **Heather Craig,** Community Project Liaison, City of Edmonton
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- **Keiko Shikako, PhD,** Associate Professor, McGill University
- **Kerri Jack,** Inclusion and Accessibility Coordinator, Recreation Nova Scotia
- **Laurie Muise,** Recreation Officer, Town of Oromocto, New Brunswick
- **Lindsay Johnston,** Recreation Manager, Village of Teslin, Yukon
- **Meredith Wing,** Graduate Student, Queen's University
- **Mike Arthur,** Chair, Active Abilities Canada
- **Moni Lowe,** Executive Director, Recreation Opportunities for Children (ROC) Eastman, Manitoba
- **Mubina Jaffer,** Manager, Training and Education, Abilities Centre, Whitby
- **Rebecca Thandi,** Municipal Recreation Expert, British Colombia
- **Sarah Lawrason, PhD,** Evaluation Specialist, Canadian Disability Participation Project
- **Sarah Ane,** Director of Policy and Partnerships, Parks and Recreation Ontario
- **Shelley Hassard,** Municipal Expert, Yukon
- **Tracy Stevenson,** Municipal Recreation Expert, Prince Edward Island
- **Trisha Rose,** Accessibility and Inclusion Facilitator, City of St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

Focus Groups

Six focus groups from 2024-2025 were held to understand how well recreational activities are available for persons with disabilities in Canada. Twenty people participated in these sessions, including five persons with disabilities, five caregivers, and ten staff members from municipal recreation departments. These participants came from 18 different municipalities across five provinces: Ontario, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and Alberta. The goal of these sessions was to learn about the current state of recreational opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Rapid Scoping Reviews

Our researchers completed five rapid scoping reviews, one for each of the following areas of practice: programming, built environment, workplace culture, staff training, and partnerships. The rapid scoping review method was utilized to gather and summarize existing research in a timely manner. Multiple academic databases with the help of a librarian were accessed, and key search terms were optimized.

Existing Resource Adaptation

Based on knowledge of existing resources and literature, three resources were presented to the Consensus Panel to be used in the Guide. Using a research method called *Adolopment* allows for organizations and researchers to adopt existing guidelines exactly as they are, adapt them by making some changes, or develop new recommendations from scratch. Our Consensus Panel chose to *adapt* the three resources below for the following areas of practice.

Area of Practice: Communication
Assisting, Informing and Motivating Physical Activity (AIMPA) Recommendations

Area of Practice: Evaluation
Disability and Physical Activity Program Evaluation Toolkit

Area of Practice: Persuading Decision-Makers
Investing in Sport, Physical Activity, and Recreation: How to Influence Decision-Makers Toolkit

We thank the authors of these resources for their support. Please contact Active Abilities Canada at **info@activeabilities.ca** for author citations.

Additional Consultation

Drafts were sent across Canada for feedback through a survey. Survey respondents represented all provinces and territories and included municipal recreation professionals, persons with disabilities, and caregivers. Based on the feedback received, changes were made to the Guide.

How to Use the Guide

As municipalities come in varying sizes and have different needs and capacity, this Guide can be used in many ways:

- Educational Tool
- Municipal Planning Guide
- Action/Strategy Planning
- List of Ideas for Inclusion
- Staff Training Resource
- Tool for Long-Term Change
- Accountability Checklist
- Awareness and Advocacy Tool
- Endorsed/Adopted by Municipal Council

Glossary of Terms

To help you understand the Guide better, we have included a glossary of terms used throughout the document. The way we talk about disability is very personal and can change over time. The definitions we provide might not perfectly match everyone's experiences, but they reflect the practices and current understanding of disability.

Allyship is a relationship dynamic between allies and persons with disabilities where there is a shared commitment to dismantling systems of disability oppression.

Accommodation is the modification of a work environment and the creation of a welcoming workplace for employees so that they can perform job functions efficiently and safely. Accommodation should be a forethought and intentional.

Accessibility is the foundation that allows everyone to be included. Inclusion helps create meaningful experiences. When these experiences happen regularly, they lead to high-quality participation.

Adapted physical activity: Sports, games, exercise, or physical activity programs that are modified so persons with disabilities can fully participate.

Area of practice is an overarching theme or category of how-to strategies for disability inclusion in municipal recreation. There are eight areas of practice in this Guide, and dozens or more how-to strategies in each area.

Capacity building is the process by which individuals, groups, organizations, and communities increase their abilities to perform core functions, solve problems, define and achieve objectives and understand their development needs in a sustainable way and broader context.

Disability refers to any kind of impairment that affects how someone's body or mind works. This can include seeing, hearing, mobility, flexibility, dexterity, developmental, mental health, memory, learning, pain, and unknown disabilities. It can be something that lasts forever, happens sometimes, or is temporary. Even if you can't see it, a disability can make it harder for someone to fully participate in society because of barriers they might face. For definitions of disability types, please visit Statistics Canada's **Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022: Concepts and Methods Guide**.

Evaluation: A planned process to collect and analyze information to see how well a program works and to guide ongoing improvement.

How-to strategies are specific instructions or actions.

Inclusion means making sure everyone can take part in activities, programs, events, or roles to the best of their ability.

Incidental physical activity: Everyday activities that involve movement, such as walking to school or helping at home. These are usually light-intensity forms of activity.

Inclusive physical activity: Physical activity programs where persons with and without disabilities participate together in the same activities.

Indicator: A number or observation that shows something important about a program, such as participation rates, behaviours, or community outcomes.

Interview: A directed conversation used to gather detailed information from a person about their experiences or opinions. They can be face-to-face, by phone, or online, and can follow set questions or be more open-ended.

Integrated physical activity: Physical activity programs or settings where persons with disabilities are brought into a program that has been designed for persons without disabilities.

Intersectionality is a framework for understanding how a person's various social identities—such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class—combine to create unique experiences of both advantage and disadvantage.

Light physical activity: Intentional activities that require little effort and do not cause noticeable changes in breathing, such as slow walking or easy stretching.

Measure: A tool or set of questions used to describe and compare different parts of a program or behaviour being studied.

Medical model of disability: The language of the medical model is medical and clinical. Disability is perceived as an impairment in a body function that is inherently pathological, and the goal is to return the function to as close to "normal" as possible.

Moderate to vigorous physical activity: Activities that take more effort and make participants breathe harder and feel warmer or tired, such as running, swimming, or playing soccer.

Neurodiverse refers to how thought patterns and behavioural traits vary in humans. "Neurodivergent" can describe persons on the autism spectrum and anyone who experiences neurologically different patterns of thought or behaviour.

Outcome: A result or change tracked during a project or program to see if it made a difference.

Physical activity: Any movement of the body that uses energy and increases heart rate and breathing.

Program: A set of planned activities or events designed to help people or communities achieve a goal.

Questionnaire/survey: A set of questions used to collect information about people's characteristics, attitudes, or behaviours. These can be done on paper, online, or through interviews.

RE-AIM: A framework for measuring the public impact of health or recreation programs. The five parts are Reach, Effectiveness, Adoption, Implementation, and Maintenance.

Social model of disability: Disability is seen as one aspect of a person's identity, much like gender, race/ethnicity, etc. From this perspective, the way to address disability is to change the environment and society, rather than people with disabilities.

Structured physical activity: Planned and organized activities such as fitness classes, sports practices, or swimming lessons.

Target population: The specific group of people that a program or evaluation is designed to impact or represent.

Unstructured physical activity: Spontaneous, self-guided movement or play, such as playground games, free swimming, or unplanned use of parks and recreation spaces.

Person(s) with disabilities refer to individuals who have some kind of impairment that affects how their body or mind works. This includes physical, mental, intellectual, learning, communication, or sensory challenges. These challenges can be permanent, temporary, or happen from time to time. Even if you can't see it, a disability can make it harder for someone to fully participate in society because of barriers they face. It's important to say "person with a disability" because the person is not defined by their disability; they are individuals who happen to have a disability.

Quality participation is an individual's perception that their participation in an activity, program, event, or role has been positive, satisfying, and enjoyable.

Universal design is a way of creating products, buildings and outdoor spaces, and environments that are easy for everyone to use, no matter their age, size, or ability. It means designing things so that they are accessible and useful to as many people as possible without needing special changes. It's not just about helping persons with disabilities; it's about creating good design that benefits everyone. For example, automatic doors are helpful not just for people in wheelchairs, but also for parents with strollers or people carrying heavy bags.

Visitability is a way of designing homes and buildings so that they are easy for everyone to visit, especially people with mobility issues. This means including simple accessibility features that make it possible for visitors to enter and move around the main floor easily.

Area of Practice: Programming

Municipal recreation programming that is inclusive allows for persons with disabilities to fully participate and engage. It includes creating programming where everyone can join in, and providing information, products, services, and spaces that can be adapted to meet each person's unique needs.



Executive Summary

There are many evidence-based practices to help you develop and implement inclusive programming with your municipality. They are divided into four interrelated groups below:

1. **Assessing and Building Capacity:** This section explains how to evaluate your department's ability to offer inclusive recreation by identifying key staff, understanding resource needs, and addressing barriers to participation.
2. **Involving Key Parties in Program Development:** Here, you will learn how to engage persons with disabilities and their caregivers in shaping programs that meet their needs and preferences.
3. **Program Mix and Logistics:** This section covers the aspects to consider in creating affordable, consistent, and accessible programs, such as costs, scheduling, equipment, and transportation.
4. **Program Development and Implementation:** Here, you will learn tips for developing and implementing a culture of inclusion in the delivery of programs.

How-to Strategies

Assessing and Building Capacity

General Practices

- Identify an inclusive recreation champion within the recreation department to align community needs with municipal plans.
- Planning programs should prioritize the needs of participants, using feedback and community input to guide development. Emphasize universal design to ensure all levels of participation are considered.
- Evaluate past programs to identify and address barriers to participation.
- Conduct an accessibility audit of facilities.
- Identify budgetary requirements for program logistics and human resources.

Staff Recruitment and Capacity-Building

- Hire instructors/staff with certification and/or experience related to disability.
- Partner with high schools, colleges and universities to train and hire professional staff.
- Team up and meet regularly with other nearby municipalities to share resources for inclusive recreation.
- Connect with community groups, disability organizations, or other recreation departments.

Different Roles For Inclusive Programming

- **Inclusion Facilitators**
    - Inclusion facilitators play a crucial role in providing individualized support to neurodivergent individuals in recreation settings. They should be sympathetic, patient, and friendly. They should have a background or expertise in the specific activity, such as a fitness background for exercise programs or an art degree for art programs. They should be able to adjust their communication style to meet the needs of each participant and have strong advocacy skills.
- **Instructors (staff or volunteers)**
    - Instructors should offer praise for the effort exerted by participants. They need to be able to adapt skill levels and provide alternatives to achieve results. It is best that they have experience working with persons with disabilities and/or certifications relating to adapted recreation. They should recognize class and program dynamics and provide help if needed.
- **Others**
    - Individuals, such as day camp staff and coaches, who interact directly with participants, play a vital role in creating a welcoming and inclusive environment. They should be kind, approachable, and friendly, making participants feel comfortable and supported. They should be informed about participants' disabilities and understand how each individual prefers to communicate. They should respect participants' space and choices, recognizing that silence can be a form of communication indicating a lack of understanding, comfort, or interest. Finally, they should learn about participants' likes and interests to tailor activities that engage them.

Training for Inclusive Programming

- Teach staff, volunteers, and instructors how to build strong communication skills within a group. This includes showing others how to interact with people who use nonverbal communication. This can be done in clear ways, such as teaching them how to use tools or devices that help with communication, or through indirect methods, such as demonstrating helpful behaviours for others to follow.
- Ask community groups and organizations that support persons with disabilities to come and share ideas on how to interact and help with your program staff. Make sure to thank them properly for their time and the valuable information they share by giving them fair compensation.
    - When persons with disabilities are asked to help with a project, such as contributing to staff training, it's important to offer them something in return for their time and expertise. The compensation should be fair based on how much they are involved. It can be money or something else, such as gift cards or a letter saying they did a great job. It's also important to ask them what kind of compensation they would prefer.
    - When persons with disabilities are asked to help with a project, such as contributing to staff training, they should not have to pay any costs themselves. For example, if there are meetings during mealtimes, food should be provided. If they need to travel to participate, they should be given help with transportation costs.
- Make sure that staff and volunteers have regular talks with senior staff before, during, and after each program session.
- Encourage positive social interactions and behaviours among all participants, whether they have disabilities or not. This should happen during planned activities, free time, and when moving from one activity to another.
- For exercise programs, training should cover how to adapt common exercises, what to expect when working with persons with disabilities, and disability awareness.

- Other training topics:
  - Motivating Persons with Disabilities
  - Assisting Persons With Disabilities When Necessary
  - Communicating With Persons With Disabilities
  - Providing Accommodations
  - Fostering Social Responsibility
  - Personal Care, Lifts, and Transfers
  - Managing and Supporting Difficult Situations
- For more information, check out the Area of Practice: **Staff Training**

Involving Key Parties in Program Development

Designing Programs

- Ask persons with disabilities who use your facility about their interests, what's missing, and what they need.
- Make sure your programs meet what the community wants and needs. For example, offer programs that are just for persons with disabilities or ones that include everyone. You might even offer both types of programs.
- Allow participants to bring their own caregivers or support workers into programs without charging them extra. Make sure to mention this in your promotional materials so everyone knows.
- Ask physical education teachers what activities are most successful when teaching persons with disabilities in a school setting.

Preparing for Participants' Needs

- Ask participants and their caregivers about their interests, skills, and what they need to participate. This includes things such as transportation schedules, special equipment, accommodations, and advice on how to keep them engaged.
- Offer different ways for participants and caregivers to share their needs, such as phone calls, emails, online forms, or paper questionnaires.
- Before a program starts, make sure staff, volunteers, and support workers know about the participants' needs and interests.
- Invite participants and their caregivers to visit the facility before the program starts.
- Create guides, videos, and social stories about the facility to help participants know what to expect.
- Arrange a meet-and-greet with staff before the program starts.

Building Relationships with Caregivers of Enrolled Participants

- Make sure staff and volunteers have time to meet and greet caregivers before programs start and check in with them afterwards.

Evaluation and Feedback

- Here's how you can get feedback from participants and their caregivers during a program:
    - **Make It Easy to Share Thoughts**
        - Create a suggestion box where people can leave anonymous notes.
        - Send out online surveys to parents and caregivers at the end of each program.

- **Form an Advisory Team**
    - Start with a casual group that can grow into a more formal committee. You could use an existing committee, like a youth advisory committee for kids and teens.
    - Have regular meetings or direct contact with managers to hear and act on feedback from these committees.
- When possible, give caregivers the option to watch the programs. As they get to know and trust the program and staff, they might not need to observe as much anymore.
- Consider hiring an outside organization to look at your programs and find areas that need improvement.
- Think about gathering feedback from staff about their safety and wellbeing after they finish a program. Ask them to share both good and bad experiences.
    - For more information, check out the Area of Practice: **Evaluation**

Program Mix and Logistics

Affordability

- Consider offering affordable programs with options like these:
    - **Flexible Payment Plans** (let participants pay in installments before the program starts)
    - **Free Trials**
    - **Subsidized Activities**
    - **Finding Extra Funding** (grants or other sources)
    - **Sliding Fee Scale**
    - **Family Discounts** (running programs for parents and kids at the same time). When checking participants' income, you can use different methods. Some ways include looking at their financial documents, or you can trust them to be honest about their situation.
- Try to partner with other groups to share resources and costs.

- Offer flexible membership plans that let people pause or freeze their subscriptions if they need to.
- Work with other organizations or public bodies to reduce costs. For example, you can share equipment or provide training together.
- Utilize and share resources such as **Jooay**, a free app that helps children with disabilities and their families to locate recreation and leisure opportunities that are accessible and suit their needs and abilities.
- Instead of hiring full-time staff, recruit high school students for volunteer hours or students from colleges and universities who want to gain experience.
- You might need to limit the number of programs you offer. To decide which ones to keep, ask the community and regular participants for their input. This way, you can prioritize the programs that are most important to them.

Consistency

- When possible, run programs at the same time on the same days and during the same seasons.
- Try to have the same staff members and volunteers work on the same programs regularly.

Adapted Equipment

- Offer an adapted equipment loan program.
- Consider teaming up with rehabilitation or occupational therapists to figure out what equipment participants need.
- Determine what equipment is necessary for different activities, such as swimming or sports camps.
- Create a list of all the equipment you have.
- Partner with organizations that support persons with disabilities or apply for funding to get adaptive equipment.
    - For more information, check out the Area of Practice: **Partnerships**

Mix of Program Offerings

- Provide programs that include both persons with disabilities and those without, as well as programs just for persons with disabilities. Consider the different types of disabilities (such as physical, sensory, or neurodivergence) and what your community needs and prefers. You might offer both integrated programs (where everyone participates together) and segregated programs (where persons with similar needs are together).
- If possible, offer a range of programs such as arts, sports, and more. For example, an art program could include drawing, painting, and collaging, while a sports camp might include baseball, wheelchair basketball, and competitions. Make sure to have a mix of programs that teach skills, build abilities, and encourage socializing.
- Invite persons with disabilities to help design materials such as program descriptions online or newsletters. Ensure these materials show a diverse group of participants, including those with disabilities and other underrepresented groups.
    - For more information, check out the Area of Practice: **Communication**
- Instead of just grouping by age, offer program levels based on skill or ability.
- Plan programs around what the community needs, such as making sure transportation is accessible. Consider things like bus schedules to help people get to programs easily.
- Refer to the **inclusion spectrum**, which factors in the composition of the group, the environment, the nature of the activity, the available equipment, and the number of coaches' and/or trained staff present, when developing your program offerings.
- Design programs so everyone can participate together. Give participants the freedom to make choices and be part of activities that are meant for everyone.
- Here's how you can develop a strong policy to support people in your programs:
    - **Allowing Personal Support Persons:** Let participants bring their own support people to programs without charging them extra. Also, make sure these support people are welcome to attend programs with the participants.
    - **Fair Allocation of Support Staff:** Create a fair and accessible way to decide who gets one-on-one support staff, based on what participants need.
    - **Ensuring Support is Available:** Make sure one-on-one support is available for programs when participants need it.

Accessible Transportation

- Schedule programs so they fit with what the community needs, such as making sure transportation is accessible.
- Create or find safe and comfortable places for picking up and dropping off participants.
- If possible, arrange for accessible transportation for participants. This could mean setting up carpool services, using accessible buses, or offering a transportation subsidy.
- Make sure participants can bring their adapted recreation equipment with them when using public or special transportation.
- When planning programs and setting fees, think about the cost of accessible transportation.
- For more information, check out the Area of Practice: **Built Environment**

Other Practices

- Depending on the program, consider having a special area where participants can relax and calm down.
- Recognize how important it is for staff, such as recreation directors, to have mentors who can guide them, provide resources, and help them grow in their roles.
- Create a detailed policy that promotes inclusion and doesn't tolerate discrimination. Make sure this policy is easy for the public to access.
- If possible, plan for extra staffing support, like having one staff member for every participant or a low staff-to-participant ratio, when budgeting for staff.
- Set up a way for staff and volunteers to share what they learn from each program session. This could be through meetings after each session or a shared board in the staff room.

Program Development and Implementation

Inclusive recreational programs are essential for fostering a sense of community and ensuring everyone can participate, regardless of their abilities. Here are some practices to help program managers, instructors, and staff create and implement high-quality, inclusive programs:

Support Interactions Between Participants

- **Unstructured Play Time**
  - When kids have free time to play, set some fun expectations to encourage everyone to join in. For example, you might say, “Try to move around and play with a friend,” or “Play a game you’ve never tried before or play with someone new.”
  - After playtime, gather everyone together to talk about what happened. Ask questions like, “Who played with someone new today?” and have them raise their hands.
  - Encourage staff to participate in playtime too. They can either join in fully or help make sure everyone is having a good time by facilitating activities.
- **General Practices**
  - Set clear expectations in your recreation department to provide high-quality programs. Support your staff so they can make sure programs include elements that help everyone participate well.
  - Staff and volunteers play a big role in helping participants become friends, especially kids. They can invite people to join activities together, ask for help from each other, and encourage teamwork.
  - If you’re doing art projects, place supplies in the middle of round tables. This helps people share and interact. Use round tables instead of square or rectangular ones. This makes it easier for anyone to join in. Keep extra art materials in open cabinets so everyone can explore and use them freely.
  - Plan activities that require participants to work together to solve problems.

- For participants who might be neurodivergent, remember that some might take time to open up or prefer not to make friends. Always respect their choices.
- Create a culture where everyone feels included and encouraged to participate. Think about things in the environment that might make people feel left out, like strong smells or too much noise. Try to fix these issues so everyone can feel comfortable and join in.

Be Flexible

- Keep activities exciting by changing things up, such as adding new equipment or changing the rules. If participants seem bored, consider moving on to a different activity.
- Create activities that are tailored to each person's abilities and strengths. Offer different levels of activities, such as beginner, advanced, group, or individual, so everyone can find something that suits them.
- Ask participants what they are interested in and use their feedback to make activities more enjoyable. Take notes on their suggestions so you can use them for future activities.

Provide Structure

- Try to keep a similar routine for each program session based on participants' needs and preferences. For example, you might end each session with a group cheer, some yoga, or mindfulness exercises. Keeping the same pairings between volunteers and participants can also be helpful, especially for some neurodivergent participants.
- Include time for informal socializing, like open play or special gatherings.
- Use activities that focus on the process, not just the result. For example, art projects where there's no "right" way to create something.
- Give all participants a chance to take on leadership roles, such as being the timekeeper, snack helper, or first aid assistant.
- Let participants choose between different activities.
- Allow participants to help design activities with their peers and staff.

- Organize games where participants work together, like staff vs. participants. These games can be especially helpful for some neurodivergent participants.
- Let participants help create the rules for the program. Use a display with words and pictures to remind everyone of these expectations. This helps new participants learn the rules and feel welcome.

Set Goals

- Help participants set goals that are just right for them—goals they can achieve often.
- Encourage participants to push themselves a bit to reach their goals. Celebrate and praise every achievement, no matter how small it might seem.
- As participants get better, help them adjust their goals or create new ones. Encourage them to try new things and step out of their comfort zone.
    - Refer to the Assisting, Informing and Motivating Physical Activity **recommendation #4** on ideas to support physical activity participation, goal setting, planning, and progress.

Other Practices

- Give staff detailed information about each participant's abilities and any special considerations they might need. This helps staff know how to best support them, without needing to know their diagnosis.
- Use positive reinforcement by giving participants lots of different kinds of feedback when they succeed or try hard. Encourage them to keep going even when things get tough and be proud of what they achieve.
- Listen to and respect what participants think and feel. Make sure they know their opinions matter.
- Allow participants with disabilities to bring a sibling or friend to programs.

Success Stories

Truro, Nova Scotia

Shannon (she/her), the active living coordinator in Truro, a small community in Nova Scotia, is driven by a passion to serve her community. Along with a dedicated team of staff, volunteers, parents, siblings, and athletes, she has helped create and maintain an inclusive sledge hockey program over the past decade. This program was born out of a need expressed by residents, who previously had to travel to Halifax for similar opportunities.

The program welcomes participants of all ages and abilities, ensuring everyone can join in. To cater to different skill levels, Shannon and her team divide the ice rink into separate zones. They offer both basic skills training and game-like scrimmages at the same time. Initially, parents were asked to stay during sessions to help ensure safety while staff learned more about specific needs. Although it's no longer required, many parents still attend, helping newcomers feel comfortable and answering questions. This helps build connections between participants and their families, making the program even more valuable.

Support for the program also comes from the rink manager, who allocates prime ice time and volunteers his time outside work hours to set up the facility each weekend. As the community rallied behind the program and its success grew, it became easier to secure support from local leaders and city council over time.

Calgary, Alberta

Deanne (she/her) is a Recreation Coordinator for the City of Calgary, with many years of experience in creating programs that include everyone. Over her 38 years working for the city, she has seen many programs change and new ones start. For example, day camps have evolved over time. To make sure these programs are effective, Deanne uses feedback from participants and their families, often gathered through casual conversations. She also checks how accessible the programs are to ensure they can handle the number of people who want to join.

Along with her team, she is always looking for ways to improve. They believe there's always more to learn and are open to feedback. They regularly talk to other organizations in the area to share ideas and advice. By reflecting on their own experiences, they regularly review program rules, such as how many staff members are needed for each group of participants. They keep everyone informed about any changes they make to ensure that both staff and participants have a great experience.

To find the right staff for her programs, Deanne focuses on recruiting people who are enthusiastic and genuinely care about making sure participants have a great experience. She doesn't just look for people who know a lot about disabilities or specific activities. Instead, she wants staff who are positive and eager to help. Deanne also asks for feedback from participants to ensure that the staff and programs are a good match.

When needed, Deanne provides her staff with training to help them do their jobs better. An important part of this process is talking to participants and their families about what they need to feel included. This helps staff prepare for challenging situations and makes sure everyone has a positive experience.

Calgary, Alberta

In Calgary, Deanne (she/her) and her team noticed that many inclusive programs were only for kids and teens. They wanted to change this by offering inclusive programs for adults too. One of their team members has a daughter who has a disability and grew too old for the youth programs, which inspired them to create something new.

At first, these adult programs ran at a deficit, but the team saw this as a necessary step to build trust with participants. They offered a variety of activities such as dance and fitness classes that anyone could join without committing to a whole season. These programs grew as participants invited their friends and shared their positive experiences with others.

To keep participants coming back, the team made sure the programs ran regularly every week, even if only a few people showed up. They also shared funds between different programs so they could offer a wide range of activities, such as arts and sports. This way, programs that were less popular could still be supported by those that were more so.

Area of Practice: Built Environment

Accessibility in municipal buildings and outdoor recreation spaces means designing them so that everyone can use them comfortably, no matter what kind of disability they might have. This includes thinking about people with physical (e.g., cerebral palsy, spinal cord injury, diabetes), sensory (e.g., low vision, hearing loss), or neurodiverse (e.g., attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia) needs.



How Can You Have an Impact on Accessibility in the Built Environment?

Making public spaces accessible can be a challenge. It often involves working with other departments and doing things like accessibility audits or joining advisory committees. However, the recreation department plays a key role in engaging with the community and delivering programs. This means your input is crucial in creating spaces that are not just accessible but also welcoming to everyone. By getting involved and taking initiative, you help ensure that your community's recreational spaces show a strong commitment to including people of all abilities.

The strategies below are meant to help you get started on your project. You'll need to adjust them to fit your local community's needs. What's most important is that, as part of your municipality's recreation department, your efforts play a big role in creating a community that welcomes and supports persons with disabilities.

Executive Summary

There are many evidence-based strategies to bring accessibility in the recreational built environment. The tips outlined below will help you have the mindset required to complete your goals.

1. **Creating momentum:** Here, you will learn tips to help you engage with community members and to secure support from leadership in government.
2. **Assess current conditions:** This section includes strategies such as using accessibility audits and writing up a report or plan.
3. **Implement audit recommendations:** Here, you will learn a few practices to help you communicate your results and track your progress.

How-to Strategies

Create Momentum

Preparing

- It's crucial to have support from senior leaders in your municipality to help with budget decisions. However, you also need community members and people who use municipal services to believe in and support your efforts.
    - For more information, check out the Area of Practice: **Persuading Decision-Makers**
- Universal design is not just about making buildings and outdoor spaces accessible. It's also about how people interact with these spaces. Staff need to be educated on how to work effectively in these environments.
- Consult with the existing municipal accessibility plan, if there is one. Provinces with accessibility legislation require it.
- Look at the policies in your municipality and compare them with those in similar communities, whether they are urban or rural.
- Read academic articles, such as free research papers on Google Scholar. You can also look at information from disability-focused groups, such as the Rick Hansen Foundation, to find the best and newest practices being used today.
- Think about what has worked well in your municipality's past accessibility projects. Building relationships with other departments can help you understand how they plan and implement accessibility initiatives.

Engaging with the Community

- **Outreach**
    - Get a variety of people involved right from the start. This includes people with different kinds of disabilities (like physical, sensory, or invisible disabilities), as well as their caregivers, family, and friends. Consider offering childcare so more people can participate.

- Create materials that are easy to understand and use plain language. Provide clear instructions and offer different ways for people to give their input, both online and in person.
    - For more information, check out the Area of Practice: **Communication**
- Instead of asking people to come to you, consider going to where they are or working with organizations that support them.
- Try various methods to reach people, such as signs in parks with QR codes, site visits where people can explore the space, workshops, public meetings, and online platforms.

- **Getting People Involved**
    - Create a plan to talk to everyone in the community, especially persons with disabilities. Make clear goals and explain how you'll use people's ideas. Keep talking to people even after the project is done to make things better.
        - For more information, check out the Area of Practice: **Partnerships**
    - Be open and honest. Show people how you made decisions and used their ideas. Share updates through newsletters or social media.
    - Get help from experts. Hire people who are good at talking to different groups, including those with disabilities. These helpers should know about making things accessible.
    - Budget enough funds to talk to everyone properly.
    - If you ask persons with disabilities for special help, pay them for their time. Ask them what kind of reward they prefer, such as money, a gift card, or a letter of recommendation. Compensation should be fair.
    - If you invite persons with disabilities to meetings, give them food and help with travel. Make sure there are no costs to them for helping you.
    - Don't rush. Give everyone time to understand and share their thoughts.
    - If you can, create an accessibility advisory committee to make sure everyone's needs are met (see below).

- **Making the Process Inclusive**
  - Use different ways to talk. Have people who can use sign language to help those who are deaf. Describe pictures for people who can't see them.
  - Pick places that are easy for everyone to use and offer the following features:
    - Good entrances
    - Good lighting
    - Alarms people can see
    - Sound systems
    - Washrooms everyone can use
    - Signs that are easy to read
  - Set up the room so everyone can see and move around easily.
  - Think about these aspects:
    - How people can get there by bus or car
    - Places to park for persons with disabilities
    - The best time of day for the meeting
  - Explain to people how to get into the building. Tell them where the washrooms are and where to park.
  - Help people who need extra support by offering them special tools to see or hear better. Hire people who can use sign language. Use technology, for example, a device that shows words on a screen as people talk. Provide information in different forms, like braille or large print. Allow service animals and caregivers to come.
  - Pay attention to what people say. Be patient and try to understand how others feel.

Investing in an Accessibility Advisory Committee

If your municipality already has a committee, go to their meetings and talk about recreational activities. Describe problems people face when they try to join in sports or games. Send someone from your team to the meetings or write a short report about making activities easier for everyone. Share ideas in other ways that work for you.

If you don't have such a committee yet, you can use the ideas below to start one in your recreation department or for your whole municipality.

- **Role of the Accessibility Advisory Committee**
  - The Accessibility Advisory Committee should be independent, not just an extension of the municipality. Think about setting up a joint team with other municipalities or departments.
  - Create a mission statement and values for the accessibility advisory committee that the members can change.
- **Recruitment Considerations**
  - Make sure your application process is easy for everyone to use.
  - Share job or volunteer opportunities in different formats, like large print or audio.
  - Reach out to various organizations to tell them about the opportunities. Explain how working with the committee can make a difference.
  - Choose a staff member to be accessibility coordinator.
  - Include a mix of people on your team, such as staff, volunteers, persons with disabilities, and advocates who understand disability issues.
  - Pay persons with disabilities fairly for their time and expertise. This can be money or other rewards, such as free passes to programs. Ask them what works best for them. It's important to compensate persons with disabilities fairly.

- **Committee Practices**
  - Make sure everyone knows what “visitability,” “accessibility,” “inclusion,” and “universal design” mean.
  - Create a mission statement that explains why we’re working on accessibility and what we hope to achieve.
  - Host public meetings that can also be streamed online
  - Give committee members a special introduction to important laws and rules.

General Practices

- Focus on the process and importance of making buildings and outdoor spaces accessible before bringing up costs.
- Explain that universal design in new buildings doesn’t cost much more. But if accessibility is not included from the start, issues may need to be fixed later, and that can be very expensive.
- Review the Rick Hansen **Municipal Accessibility Policy Toolkit** to help you with crafting policies around accessibility in the built environment.

Assess Current Conditions (Audit)

Accessibility Audit

- Find experts who know how to do accessibility audits. You can use your accessibility committee or ask an outside group for help.
- Talk to persons with disabilities in person, send them surveys, or invite them to help with site visits. This can include walking or rolling through spaces to see what needs improvement.
- Focus on the most-used buildings and outdoor spaces.
- If your municipality does not have its own accessibility standards, look at what others are doing.
- Think about what you have already done to improve accessibility and what challenges you faced.

Accessibility Audit Report

- **Content**
  - Include pictures and references to the building regulations.
  - Add details about the buildings and outdoor spaces you are talking about.
  - Create a report that's easy to navigate and includes links to more information.
  - Make sure it follows municipal and provincial rules for making everything accessible to everyone.
  - Decide which barriers to remove first, like focusing on the buildings and outdoor spaces people use the most or making changes that don't cost much.
  - In the part of the plan about putting things into action, include ways to measure how well things are going. This helps senior managers see if progress is being made.
  - In the action part of the plan, say who is responsible for each task, such as removing barriers. Include how much each part will cost, when it will happen, and how you will check if it's working. Explain how you'll answer questions and handle complaints. Work with the people who will be doing the work to develop this part of the plan.
  - Share a draft of your report with everyone who helped make it and get their final approval.
  - Ask the community, especially persons with disabilities, for feedback. You can do this by posting the draft online or having a meeting.
  - Use simple language and make the report look nice and easy to understand.

Accessibility Audits

Below are expert organizations that can be contacted to conduct an accessibility audit:

- **Rick Hansen Foundation**
- **Accessibility Partners Canada**
- **SPARC BC**
- **"The Accessibility Planning Toolkit for Municipalities" by Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate**

Implementing Accessibility Audit Recommendations

Communication

- Give the accessibility audit report to important people like the municipal manager and top leaders. Share it with the whole community through different ways, such as posting it on the municipal website or including it in newsletters.
- If possible, make the report available in different formats, such as large print, for people who need bigger text and audio versions for those who prefer listening.
- Create ways for people to give feedback. Use tools like suggestion boxes where people can write down their ideas or questionnaires or surveys to gather opinions.
    - For more information, check out the Area of Practice: **Communication**

Monitoring Progress

- Host regular meetings with leaders of the accessibility advisory committee and the accessibility coordinator (if there is one) while carrying out each project.
- Revise and update the audit recommendations annually.

Success Stories

Shelburne, Nova Scotia

In Shelburne, Nova Scotia, a small town is making big changes to ensure everyone can enjoy their community spaces. Adam, the Director of Recreation and Parks, is leading the way. He was inspired by his predecessor's commitment to making sure everyone can participate.

Adam and his team always think about how they can creatively adapt environments to support people of all ages and abilities. They created a simple policy that guides all their projects. This policy helps them get support from councils, plan budgets, and manage big projects.

While looking at public guidelines for accessibility was helpful, Adam's team wanted to do more than just meet the minimum requirements. For them, accessibility is not just about physical structures such as walls and doors. It's about creating environments that make people feel safe and supported, and that provide positive experiences for everyone.

Adam sees built environments as constantly changing. As people interact with spaces, the environment must evolve to meet their needs. A great example of this approach is the recent upgrade of a popular local park. The park is used a lot by both locals and visitors, so they wanted to make sure it was accessible to everyone. With the help of a grant, they hired a consultant to assess the park's accessibility. The consultant identified what was working well, what needed improvement, and provided recommendations for future design.

Getting feedback from the community was crucial. Adam's team met with an accessibility advisory committee and took community members with disabilities on site visits. This ongoing conversation helped them adapt the park's design to better serve their diverse community.

Edmonton, Alberta

Heather (she/her) has spent over a decade with the City of Edmonton, working on projects that promote inclusivity and accessibility. In 2018, she teamed up with Yogi Subramonian, a colleague and fellow accessibility champion with expertise in architecture, to develop a groundbreaking policy: **Accessibility for People with Disabilities Policy C602**. This policy was officially approved in 2019.

To implement this policy, Heather helped create the first three-year **Corporate Accessibility Plan**, which ran from 2021 to 2024. Currently, she is working on the second multi-year plan, set to begin in 2025. The City of Edmonton also developed its own "Access Design Guide," which exceeds the requirements of the Alberta Building Code. This Guide ensures that all new buildings are designed with accessibility in mind.

Heather credits two key factors for the success of her work: securing support from senior leadership and creating a change management plan. This plan helped staff understand the policy and fostered a cultural shift toward greater acceptance and understanding. Engaging with persons with disabilities, inclusive programmers, and community allies was also crucial. Feedback was gathered through online surveys and in-person sessions held at familiar community spaces. This feedback was shared across departments, leading to actions that addressed identified barriers.

Area of Practice: Workplace Culture

Inclusive workplace culture is a system in organizations and municipal recreation departments that focuses on including persons with disabilities. This starts with leaders supporting the idea and continues through practices in human resources.



How Can You Have an Impact on Disability Inclusion in the Workplace?

As staff in a municipal recreation department, you play a crucial role in shaping a workplace that welcomes everyone. You're not just in charge; you're someone who **can make a real difference.** Your commitment to including persons with disabilities should be more than just words—it should be seen in everything you do. When you show that you truly care about disability inclusion, you send a strong message to your team. You demonstrate that inclusion is a key part of your department's mission, not just something you talk about. By leading with actions, you inspire your team to do the same.

The following ideas are meant to help you improve disability inclusion in your workplace. You will need to adjust them to fit your specific situation as in the two examples below.

- **Rural Municipalities:** If you are in a small municipality and do not have a separate human resources department, or if your staff is very busy, focus on the most important and achievable practices for your situation.
- **Larger Municipalities:** If you have a human resources department, think about how you can work more closely with them and implement these practices across the entire municipality. Or choose actions that you can easily add to your recreation department's everyday work culture.

As a leader, it is important to remember that your actions, as well as your intentions, have an impact on creating a workplace where all persons with disabilities feel included and valued.

Executive Summary

There are many evidence-based practices to establish an inclusive workplace culture and management. They are divided into four groups below:

1. **Accommodations:** This section provides tips on how to handle requests for accommodations, how to provide them, and what to do if an accommodation needs to be changed or re-evaluated.
2. **Workplace Documents:** Here, you will find strategies on what to include in your workplace policies, reports, and your department's mission statement.
3. **Human Resources-Related Practices:** This section covers inclusive hiring practices, from finding candidates to keeping employees, and ideas for topics to include in employee training.
4. **Interpersonal Roles:** Here, you will find tips on communication, building relationships, and working together, with an emphasis on the important role of leadership in creating a culture where everyone feels valued.

How-to Strategies

Accommodations

Disclosures

- Recognize that employees do not need to automatically and immediately disclose private health information (i.e., their disability).
- Create a pathway for employees to disclose their disability status or request accommodations should they choose to. Refer to the **Canadian Human Rights Commission** or the **Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work** for more guidance.
- Ensure that you have the necessary infrastructure in place so that any required adjustments or accommodations can be made promptly following a disclosure. Refer to the **Canadian Human Rights Commission** or the **Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work** for more guidance.

Perspective on Accommodations

- Think of accommodations as support for your employees, not just as something you have to do to follow the law.
- Any employee should be able to get accommodations, even if they haven't told you they have a disability.
- Keep in mind that not all persons with disabilities need the same accommodations. For example, not all wheelchair users need accommodations, or they might need different things.
- Sometimes, accommodations don't work perfectly right away. For example, it might take a few tries to find the best work schedule for everyone. It's important to be patient and understanding as you figure things out together.

Providing Accommodations

- If you can, think about having someone whose job is to help with accommodations.
- When hiring, make sure to let people know that accommodations are available. You can do this in job postings, during interviews, or by mentioning the accommodations team or assistant, if you have one.
- Create a centralized accommodation budget. Refer to the **Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work** for more guidance.
- Work with other groups to help provide accommodations, such as special equipment.
- Recognize there are many ways to perform tasks.
- Accommodations can mean making changes to the work environment, like adding blue light filters or noise-cancelling headphones. They can also mean changing workplace policies, such as allowing someone to work from home or have their own desk even if the office uses hot desking/shared workspaces.
- Think about adding some common accommodations to your workplace policies. For example, you could allow people to work remotely, have flexible hours, or take more frequent breaks.

Evaluating and Changing Accommodations

- Check in regularly to see if accommodations are working well. For example, after a new employee starts, it's good to revisit their accommodations soon, since you never really know what you need until you begin the job. How often you check in depends on how much time you have. You could do it monthly, every six months, or whatever works best for you.
- Create a pathway for employees with disabilities to provide feedback on accommodations.
- Accommodations might need to change, especially when someone returns to work after a health or disability-related issue. If an accommodation needs to be adjusted, it's important to follow the accommodation process again to make sure it still meets the employee's needs.
- It's okay if an accommodation doesn't work out at first. Sometimes, what looks great on paper doesn't translate well into reality. That's why it's crucial to check in and adjust solutions as needed.

Responsibility of Leadership

- As a leader, you should offer accommodations proactively, such as mentioning them in job postings and recruitment materials. Don't wait for employees to ask—take the first step in creating an inclusive workplace.
- Make sure everyone knows who is responsible for each part of the accommodation process. This means clearly explaining each person's role and making sure everyone understands it. Keep reminding people about these responsibilities.
- You have a big influence as a leader on how people talk about accommodations at work. It's up to you to make sure everyone feels safe and comfortable sharing their needs. Leaders should always treat employees with respect and create an environment where people feel supported.

Workplace Documents

Harassment / Discrimination / Mistreatment Policies

- Make it clear that there's zero tolerance for any kind of mistreatment, harassment, or discrimination based on disability. Treat disability harassment just as seriously as you would treat sexual harassment.
- Make sure your workplace policies include specific information about disability. Explain how you will respond to complaints, and promise to take them seriously, act quickly, and handle them the same way every time. Refer to the **Canadian Human Rights Commission** or the **Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work** for more guidance.
- If you can, involve persons with disabilities when you're creating workplace policies. Invite them to join focus groups or panels or ask them to fill out anonymous surveys. And make sure to thank them for their time by compensating them appropriately. You can pay them money, give them free passes to programs, or find another way to show your appreciation. Talk to them about what kind of compensation they would prefer.

Mission and Values

- Create a mission statement that shows you care about society and that you're committed to hiring and keeping employees and volunteers with disabilities.
- In addition to a mission statement, create a list of values that show your organization supports inclusion and hiring persons with disabilities. For example, you could include "compassion" and "respect" to remind everyone to be understanding of differences.

Other General Practices for Policies and Reports

- Think about adding some common accommodations to your workplace policies. For example, you could allow people to work remotely.
- When you specifically ask persons with disabilities for advice on a project (such as helping create a policy), make sure you thank staff for their time by compensating them fairly.

  How to Compensate

  - **Ask Them:** The best way to thank them is to ask what they would prefer!
  - **Fairly:** Make sure the compensation matches how much they are helping.
  - **Money:** You can pay them with money.
  - **Other Gifts:** Or you can give them gift cards, a letter of recommendation, or something else they find valuable.

  Make it Easy for Them to Participate

  - **No Costs:** They shouldn't have to pay for anything to participate.
  - **Food:** If you have meetings during mealtimes, provide food.
  - **Travel:** If they need to travel, offer travel vouchers or help with transportation costs.
- Include disability as a major part of workplace inclusion and diversity policies.
- When evaluating how well your workplace is doing, include goals about disability inclusion in your reports. For example, you could track how many partnerships were created or how many hours of disability awareness training your employees have completed. Use these goals when you're evaluating performance, both for numbers and for how people act.
- Create a team of people to look at your workplace policies and find anything that might exclude people. This team should include employees, HR managers, and diversity officers. If nobody on the team has disclosed a disability, make sure to get input from persons with disabilities to help.

Human Resources-Related Practices

Enhancing Workplace Culture Through Staff Training

- Incorporate the following topics in employee training:
  - **Disability Laws and Rights**
  - **Disability Definitions**
  - **Etiquette for Interacting With Persons With Disabilities**
  - **How Employees May Use Accommodations for their Job**
  - **Diversity**
  - **Allyship**
  - **Emotional Intelligence**
  - **Bystander Training** - Training should also emphasize the importance of supporting employees with disabilities, and that discrimination against them is illegal.
- For people in charge (like managers, supervisors, and employers), it's important to include the same training topics as all employees, and the following:
  - **Disability Issues and Creative Problem-Solving**
  - **Communication Skills**
  - **Challenging the Status Quo**
  - **Commitment to Inclusive Workplace Culture and Mission and Accommodation Pathways**
  - **Acceptance, Commitment, and Support for Employees with Disabilities**
- Create training that helps people to show empathy, be open to new things, admit mistakes, and help others.
- When someone at work gets an accommodation or shares personal information, it can make coworkers curious. So, training should teach everyone to respect people's privacy.

- Think of training and onboarding as a road to good relations between the employer and employees.
    - For more information, go to the Area of Practice: **Staff Training**

Hiring

- **Job Development and Postings**
    - When writing job descriptions, it's better to focus on **what** the person needs to achieve, not exactly **how** they need to do it. This way, you recognize that the most important thing is whether the employee can get the required outcomes. Refer to the **Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work** for more guidance.
    - It's a good idea to create flexible jobs that can change to fit each employee's skills and strengths. This means letting employees shape their jobs to match what they're good at.
    - Try to build teams with a mix of the different strengths and skills people have. For example, some people are good at multitasking, some are good leaders, and some are detail oriented.
    - It's a good idea to hire an outside party to help you find ways to make your hiring process more inclusive.
    - When you're choosing people to be on the hiring committee, make sure it's a diverse group. If possible, include persons with disabilities.
- **Recruitment**
    - Create ongoing internships or trial employment programs that support meaningful employment opportunities for persons with disabilities and help them get permanent jobs.
    - Team up with groups that help persons with disabilities find jobs.
    - When writing hiring material, make sure to say that your company values diversity, and that includes persons with disabilities who may also have many different identities.
    - When you advertise jobs, make it clear that persons with disabilities are welcome to apply. Also, let them know that you can provide accommodations during the hiring process, such as for interviews.

- Make sure your online job postings and other recruitment materials follow accessibility rules. Refer to the **Canadian National Institute for the Blind** for more guidance.
- When you're hiring, think about how committed every candidate is to the inclusion of persons with disabilities. This should be seen as a good quality that everyone brings to the job. Refer to the **Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work** for more guidance.

- **Onboarding**
  - When new employees start, give them a clear plan to follow. This plan should include everything they need to know and a schedule to help them get settled in.
  - Set up a buddy system where every new employee is paired with someone who already works there. This is for all new hires, not just those with disabilities. The help that buddies give should depend on what the new employee needs and what the buddy is good at, but could cover workplace culture, work-life balance and the social environment. Refer to the **Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work** for more guidance.

- **Keeping Employees**
  - Offer flexible work schedules.
  - Allow employees to shape their jobs according to their skills and strengths.
  - Provide assistive technology (AT) to employees who want to use it. Partner with outside groups to get more AT, learn how to use it, and support employees better.
  - If a new employee wants to include other people in their onboarding process, such as people they know, organizations they're connected with, or job coaches, be open to it. Supervisors and managers should regularly meet with job coaches to demonstrate how to effectively interact with, train, and supervise their employees. Some examples are **"Ready, Willing, and Able" from Inclusion Canada** and the **Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work**.

- Set up semi-structured mentoring or buddy programs that continue after new employees are settled in. This should be for everyone, not just employees with disabilities. Refer to the **Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work** for more guidance.
- When putting together project teams, focus on finding the right fit for each person. Match job duties to the employee's skills and match the person to the role according to things such as how much structure they need, what kinds of tasks they like, and how much responsibility they can handle.

Interpersonal Roles

Supervisory and Manager Activities

- Commit to creating diversity in leadership roles.
- Obtain ongoing feedback on accommodations and address feedback with concern, action, and urgency.
- Try to put people in roles and tasks where they feel comfortable and confident.
- Create mentor roles and/or a buddy system where coworkers can support each other, especially when new employees are starting out or transitioning into the workplace.
- Create a workplace where people are open to change. You can do this by checking in on the workplace culture and helping managers understand how to improve it. Refer to the **Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work** for more guidance.

Leadership Style and Responsibilities

- Supervisors and managers aren't there to control employees. Their job is to give them the power to come up with new ideas, adapt to changes, and solve problems on their own.
- Leaders need to keep learning and changing their style to support everyone on the team, not just those with disabilities. This is a continuous process.
- Leaders should know that they are role models for all employees. They set the tone for how everyone behaves and are key to making positive changes in the workplace. Intentional effort from leaders is a must for big change to happen.

- Good things can happen when leaders switch from being controlling (autocratic) to building relationships with their team.
- Help leaders feel more confident managing employees with disabilities by role-playing and training, encouraging them to take the opportunity to manage employees with disabilities.
- Work to truly understand disability by recognizing there are many ways to view it. Ultimately, see disability inclusion as part of the bigger picture of diversity.
- Create a workplace where everyone is valued for their unique skills, interests, and what they can bring to the team. The company culture should be flexible and adapt to employees, not the other way around.
- Collaborate with nonprofit organizations, therapy centres, and other community organizations to help build capacity.
- Leaders need to have these important values:
    - **Knowledge:** Know about disability and make sure employees feel safe to share their needs.
    - **Empathy:** Be patient and understanding.
    - **Communication:** Be able to explain things clearly by showing, writing them down, and breaking down tasks.
    - **Openness:** Be open to new ideas and different ways of doing things.
    - **Tolerance:** Be okay with things not always being clear or certain.
    - **Commitment:** Want every employee to succeed and do everything you can to help them.

Social Inclusion

- Create fun social activities at work, such as ping pong, a daily crossword puzzle, shared meals, sports after work and a social club, to help people build relationships and feel good about their jobs.
- Initiate team-building activities or projects that pair employees who don't know each other well to get to know and value each other.
- Leaders (such as managers and supervisors) set expectations as to how everyone should treat each other and how to work well with all employees, including those who are neurodivergent.

Miscellaneous

- Think about hiring a consultant to help create a workplace where everyone feels included and things are open and honest. Refer to the **Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work** for some more guidance.
- Create both casual and structured ways to help people at work understand disability better and be more understanding.

Success Stories

Shelburne, Nova Scotia

Recruiting enough staff to support each season of programming is challenging for a small community like Shelburne, Nova Scotia, says Adam. Therefore, disability-related training has been valuable as part of the staff onboarding process, especially for young, seasonal, and casual staff.

This training ensures that everyone adopts the accessibility lens that the municipality uses to guide their programs. Support from external organizations like Autism Nova Scotia and High Five has been particularly important for delivering such training.

Edmonton, Alberta

Heather (she/her) has been instrumental in shaping the City of Edmonton's approach to accessibility. Over the past few years, she has developed corporate accessibility plans for the City. These plans have ensured that accessibility remains a top priority fostering a deeper passion for inclusion and sparking a growing interest in learning more about accessibility among staff.

Heather noted that the number of accessibility champions has increased, with representation from all departments. Each department now has its own accessibility committee, which works closely with corporate committees to uphold the commitment outlined in the Accessibility for People with Disabilities Policy. Heather plays a key role supporting these committees by providing data summaries, template documents, and step-by-step guides to help them succeed.

A crucial part of implementing the accessibility policy was developing staff training programs. The City created an online course available to all staff and many departments also offer training on accessibility tailored to specific jobs. The staff awareness and training efforts will be ongoing.

The City also established an internal corporate accessibility fund to support projects that address accessibility issues.

Together, these strategies have spurred a passion for inclusion among staff, centering accessibility in all aspects of their work, and creating a workplace where everyone feels valued and supported.

Area of Practice: Communication

Effective, inclusive, and accessible communication by municipal recreation leaders and front-line staff helps break down barriers, making it easier for persons with disabilities to take part in both unstructured and structured recreation and physical activity programs.



How These Strategies Were Developed

These strategies were shaped using a research method that lets organizations adopt existing guidelines exactly as they are, adapt them by making some changes, or develop new recommendations from scratch. All the advice below was adapted and based on the **Assisting, Informing and Motivating Physical Activity (AIMPA) Recommendations**. A consensus panel decided which parts to include based on their professional knowledge, lived experience, and academic expertise. They also helped revise the drafts, making sure that all changes were based on both evidence and the panel's real-life experiences.

Executive Summary

The strategies below are to support municipal recreation staff or volunteers to communicate with persons with disabilities more effectively. These approaches to implementation highlight the importance of using consistent language and definitions when supporting and communicating with persons with disabilities, as well as clearly and accurately sharing the elements of your programs, facilities and services that support their participation. They are divided into two groups below:

1. **Use Clear Language and Common Terms:** Here, you will find definitions of key words to communicate appropriately with persons with disabilities.
2. **Be Detailed When Sharing Program Information:** This section describes the type of details to communicate when speaking to, and engaging with, persons with disabilities.

How-to Strategies

Use Clear Language and Common Terms

- Use clear and consistent language to explain terms like physical activity, adapted, accessibility, integrated, and inclusive.
- Follow established disability terminology from reputable sources. For example, **Employment and Social Development Canada**.
- Remember, the preferred language in the disability community can change, so stay flexible.

Our **glossary** and the **Assisting, Informing and Motivating Physical Activity (AIMPA)** recommendations provide many useful definitions of common terms.

Be Detailed When Sharing Program Information

To ensure persons with disabilities and their support networks know about your recreation and physical activity programs, give clear and detailed information about programs, staff, and facilities. Make sure to include the following information:

- **Who is running the recreation program** — Share details about your organization (background, mission, values, policies), staff and their qualifications (photo, interesting facts, proof of security check), plus whom to contact for questions.
- **What is offered** — Clearly describe activities, how inclusive they are, competition levels, who can join, costs (fees, possible financial support, refund policy), equipment needs, support options (like the **Ontario Assistive Devices Program** or **Easter Seals Equipment Funding**), and reviews from other participants.
- **Where the recreation program is happening** — Provide a full address, list all accessibility features, give transport details, and keep people informed if there's construction going on. Check your facility's accessibility regularly using resources such as the **ADA Checklist** or **Abilities Centre Accessibility Standards**.
- **When the recreation program is available** — Publish exact dates, times, session plans, and make it easy to check when information was last updated.

Example: Multi-Sport Program

*This example is one of several included in the **AIMPA recommendations**. Municipal staff may refer to this example to help them in developing and communicating a recreation-based program that suits the needs of the participants in their programs and services.*

Our multi-sport program is an introduction to a range of sports and social skills that foster confidence in a non-competitive environment. This program is recommended and best suited for children (ages 4–12) who are beginners in sport with little experience. This program is fully inclusive of children with physical disabilities. Participants are taken through a variety of sports over eight weeks, spending two weeks on each sport learning skills and fundamentals. Over the eight weeks, children are introduced to four sports: track and field, wheelchair basketball, taekwondo and boccia. While learning the fundamentals, the program will focus on developing participants' agility, balance, coordination and confidence. Participants are encouraged to bring their own water bottle, any assistive devices, running shoes, and comfortable clothes to ensure they can fully participate to the best of their abilities. The ratio of staff to participants for this program is 1:3. Inquiries for 1:1 support can be made to the support supervisor at [Email Address]. The Multi-sport program will cost $200 for the entire eight-week program. If you require 1:1 support, an additional cost of $50 a week is applied. If you'd like to learn about various subsidies or funding options to help your child participate in the program, please visit [Website] or contact [Name] at [Contact Information]. If you would like to learn more about our multi-sport program, you can contact us at [Email Address] or call us directly at [Telephone Number] ext. [Extension Number]. We also offer an in-person information session where parents or caregivers and the child can come in and try the program and meet the instructors the week before each program begins.

Success Stories

Municipal staff used a wide variety of communication tools to stay connected with their communities.

Calgary, Alberta

In Calgary, Alberta, Deanne shared that she continuously gathers input from participants and their families—often through informal conversations—to ensure programs remain effective and responsive.

Edmonton, Alberta

In Edmonton, Alberta, Heather explained that engagement was key when the City developed their groundbreaking **Accessibility for People with Disabilities** and the associated **Corporate Accessibility Plan**. With guidance from Yogi Subramonian, the City's Accessibility Plan Implementation Lead, they worked closely with persons with disabilities, program staff, and community allies. Feedback was collected through online surveys and in-person sessions held in familiar local spaces. The insights were shared across departments, leading to concrete actions to remove barriers.

Shelburne, Nova Scotia

In Shelburne, Nova Scotia, Adam described how his team worked with the accessibility advisory committee and invited community members with disabilities to take part in on-site visits during the redesign of a popular park. These ongoing discussions helped shape a design that better met the needs of everyone.

Ottawa, Ontario

In Ottawa, Ontario, Rob and Sarah believe that true success in accessibility work is measured by how well they connect with the community. They prioritize consultation at every stage, living the principle of "nothing without us," and complement those conversations with events, advisory committees, and other opportunities to strengthen partnerships. They urge staff and project teams to be upfront about any accessibility issues as early as possible, ensuring barriers can be recognized and resolved before projects are finished. Rob stresses the value of empathy—listening carefully to understand how obstacles affect people's everyday lives. When residents bring forward concerns outside of municipal responsibility, the Accessibility Office doesn't stop at "it's not our jurisdiction"; instead, they provide information and advocacy to encourage private businesses to make their spaces and services more accessible.

Area of Practice: Staff Training

Ongoing education and training helps municipal recreation staff at all levels develop the skills and confidence needed to deliver inclusive programs and services that welcome persons with disabilities. Effective staff training should be planned, partner-driven, and designed for real-world learning and autonomy.



Executive Summary

The strategies below are meant to support coaches, fitness leaders, recreation staff, and administrators in training their staff to be better prepared to support persons with disabilities. There are many evidence-informed practices to develop and implement staff training that considers persons with disabilities. For the purposes of this Guide, they are divided into these three groups:

1. **Planning:** Here, you will find tips for first steps to take when planning and preparing for staff training that focuses on supporting persons with disabilities.
2. **Content:** This section describes how to create staff training content that is inclusive to persons with disabilities.
3. **Design and Delivery:** Here, you will find strategies to create and implement staff training to better support persons with disabilities.

How-to Strategies

Planning

- Identify training needs by determining who should be trained, what topics should be covered, who will lead the training, and how often sessions should occur.
- Explore the training suggestions of previous staff or volunteers for training suggestions.
- Explore the training suggestions of parents and caregivers of persons with disabilities.
- Review existing training resources from local, national, and international organizations before developing new ones.
- Assign staff or community partners (such as disability service agencies or local experts) to help adapt or develop materials.
- Assess budget requirements and secure funding where needed (see Area of Practice: **Persuading Decision-Makers**).
- Tailor training to the local context or develop new tools if necessary.
- Explore online inclusion training opportunities, such as **those offered here by Active Abilities Canada**.

Content

- Include local examples that allow staff to practise inclusion skills.
- Teach both the medical and social models of disability, encouraging reflection on how **personal attitudes** influence service delivery.
- Emphasize practices that encourage persons with disabilities to make choices, set personal goals, and take appropriate risks.
- Strengthen learners' knowledge, confidence, and motivation to apply inclusive practices.
- Prepare learners' to identify opportunities to apply inclusive practices.
- Provide practical strategies and adaptable tools staff can use in different situations.
- Reflect relevant provincial and municipal standards.
- Describe a programming approach where participants' experiences, needs, abilities and desires are prioritized.

Design and Delivery

- Align with local policy objectives and accessibility frameworks.
- Encourage shared learning among trainers and staff.
- Use case studies and scenario-based activities that allow staff to practise inclusion skills.
- Deliver training in partnership with people with lived experience, non-profits, schools, universities, and health professionals.
- Integrate inclusion principles into existing professional development activities or offer training as a stand-alone module.
- Use accessible formats, technology (such as online modules), and multiple modes of learning.
- Offer certification or recognition upon completion.

Other Resources on Staff Training

- Chapter on **developing training programs for staff** in the Community Tool Box from the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas
- See Area of Practice of the guide: **Programming**

Success Stories

Calgary, Alberta

In Calgary, Alberta, Deanne invests in training that helps her staff feel ready and confident in their roles. She encourages team members to talk directly with participants and families about what inclusion means to them. These conversations help staff anticipate challenges and create welcoming, positive experiences for everyone.

Shelburne, Nova Scotia

In Shelburne, Nova Scotia, Adam faces the challenge of staffing programs in a small community. To prepare new and seasonal hires, his team builds disability awareness into their onboarding process. This practical training helps staff handle real-life situations respectfully and ensures that programs reflect the community's commitment to accessibility. Support from groups like Autism Nova Scotia and High Five has made a big difference in delivering these learning sessions.

Edmonton, Alberta

In Edmonton, Alberta, Heather highlighted the City's focus on training as a cornerstone of its accessibility policy. The City launched an online course for all employees and developed specialized training for different departments. Building awareness and knowledge about accessibility is a continuing priority.

Fredericton, New Brunswick

At Accessible NB, Wendy's team stays current by paying attention to emerging accessibility issues. For instance, they've recently been exploring barriers related to electric vehicle charging stations. Their process involves asking questions, researching, and learning deeply about new topics so they can better guide municipalities and businesses—and share new knowledge across the province.

Ottawa, Ontario

In Ottawa, Ontario, the Accessibility Office provides many learning opportunities for City staff, including customized training for specific roles, manager workshops on workplace accommodation, and annual events for the United Nations' International Day of Persons with Disabilities and AccessAbility Day. Accessibility is built into the City's culture—new employee training introduces staff to the Office's role and the importance of integrating accessibility into programs, services, and facilities.

Area of Practice: Partnerships

Partnerships are key to creating inclusive, accessible recreation opportunities for everyone in the community, including persons with disabilities. Working with local organizations, advocates, and other government levels helps municipalities share resources, coordinate efforts, and change attitudes about disability. These relationships not only improve program quality but also make better use of existing community assets.



Executive Summary

There are many evidence-informed practices to develop, maintain, and apply partnerships within the recreation sector. These strategies are divided into the following four groups:

1. **Building Effective Partnerships:** Here, you will find tips on steps to take to foster partnerships with local groups and individuals.
2. **Clear and Accessible Communication:** This section describes strategies that support accessible and inclusive communication.
3. **Engaging the Community:** Here, you will learn tips on how to engage with local groups and community members.
4. **Measuring and Sustaining Success:** This section helps you determine how to evaluate and sustain your partnerships.

How-to Strategies

Building Effective Partnerships

- Take time to build relationships with local groups and individuals who share your goals. Consider developing a written agreement between partners so roles and responsibilities are clear.
- Know the purpose of each partnership—whether it's about funding, training, shared facilities, mutual learning, referrals or evaluation.
- Identify experts and partners who bring valuable skills or resources. Keep track of them in a simple database. This information is also helpful when writing a grant proposal, as many grants require partners to apply.
    - For example, join the daily newsletter from the **Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC)** to help identify partners, experts, and for the latest research and resources.
- Bring in partners from different sectors and levels of government early in planning.
- Be clear about partnership roles, contributions, and limits.
- Create a standardized yet flexible framework for partnership development to ensure fairness and consistency.

Clear and Accessible Communication

- Make sure your communications—online or otherwise—work for everyone, including persons with disabilities.
- Collaborate with IT and communications teams to meet accessibility standards.
- Keep information straightforward and updated regularly.
- Share messages through multiple channels—web, social media, print, word of mouth, radio, or trusted community networks.
- See Area of Practice: **Communication** for more tips.

Engaging the Community

- Involve persons with disabilities directly in program planning, delivery, and review.
- Invite disability organizations and recreation groups to help shape policy.
- Develop community champions who can inspire others to participate.
- Check in regularly with partners to keep collaboration strong and aligned.

Measuring and Sustaining Success

- Evaluate how well partnerships enhance participation and overall community impact.
- See Area of Practice: **Evaluation** for more tips.
- Use evaluation results to refine programs and support long-term growth and funding.

Success Story

Fredericton, New Brunswick

Wendy (she/her) leads Accessible NB, a program of Ability New Brunswick that helps communities, businesses, and organizations make accessibility part of everything they do. She knows that many people want to advance disability inclusion but need guidance on where to begin. Accessible NB fills that role by offering tools, expertise, and ongoing collaboration. The team has created a comprehensive resource database and an evidence-based accessibility audit tool, developed with input from experts and people with lived experience of disability. These tools help municipalities, recreation departments, and other partners design inclusive buildings, programs, and events from the ground up.

For Wendy and her team, building long-term, trusting relationships is just as important as the technical work. They stay in close contact with partners, provide helpful follow-ups, share funding opportunities, and offer letters of support. Every new project starts with listening—understanding each community's goals and priorities before planning next steps. Even when projects are paused, the team helps maintain progress by suggesting small, achievable actions that keep accessibility on the agenda. They also highlight partners' successes by sharing their stories publicly to inspire others.

Beyond her leadership role, Wendy is deeply involved in the broader accessibility network. She sits on multiple committees across New Brunswick and Canada, keeping pace with changes in accessibility standards and policies. These connections allow her to link people and projects, helping grow a community of practice committed to inclusion and accessibility.

Area of Practice: Evaluation

Evaluating your programs helps you understand what works, where to grow, and how to make municipal recreation more inclusive for persons with disabilities. A solid evaluation makes decisions more transparent, ensures accountability, and leads to better, evidence-based programming.



How These Strategies Were Developed

These strategies were shaped using a research method that lets organizations adopt existing guidelines exactly as they are, adapt them by making some changes, or develop new recommendations from scratch. All the advice below was adapted and based on the **Disability and Physical Activity Program Evaluation Toolkit**, which uses the **RE-AIM framework** to look at how programs reach people, how effective they are, and whether they are sustainable over time. A consensus panel decided which parts to include based on their professional knowledge, lived experience, and academic expertise. They also helped revise the drafts, making sure that all changes were based on both evidence and the panel's real-life experiences.

Quick Start Overview

Getting started with evaluation can feel complex. Before you start, ask yourself:

- Why are we doing this evaluation? What do we hope to learn?
- Do we have enough time, skills, and staff to do it well?
- Who will use the results, and how?
- How can we protect participants' privacy and minimize harm?

If you're ready, take a look at the strategies below. For more step-by-step help as you go, check out the **Disability and Physical Activity Program Evaluation Toolkit**, which offers extra guidance and tools. Most importantly, take what you need from the strategies below and the Toolkit and leave what doesn't fit now.

If you are not ready, try something simple—like one short evaluation activity at the end of a program. Invite participants and families to share what worked, what didn't, and what could improve next time.

The strategies below are designed to make the process easier, but remember to use only what you need, and don't worry if you don't use everything right away. You can always come back for more, as you need it.

Executive Summary

The strategies outlined below are designed to support municipal recreation staff, health care practitioners, coaches, and administrators in developing respectful, ethical, and effective evaluations with which to improve their ability to support persons with disabilities. The tips provided in this Guide encompass the evaluation process from development to application, and are divided into the following four groups:

1. **Know Your Why:** This section offers tips to help you understand the purpose of the evaluation.
2. **Make Sure You Are Ready:** Here, you will find tips on ensuring that you and your staff have the capacity to create and conduct an ethical evaluation.
3. **Build the Right Evaluation Plan:** This section offers strategies on how to actually create an evaluation and the types of indicators that you may want to consider evaluating.
4. **Manage Your Data Wisely:** Here is where you will find strategies to appropriately organize, interpret, and protect the data you are collecting.

How-to Strategies

Know Your Why

Think about who will use the information from this evaluation —such as funders or municipal staff. Ask yourself:

- Is this program worth keeping?
- Are participants getting the benefits you expected?
- Do funders and leaders know why your program matters?
- Do staff know where to focus their work?
- Are there themes across programs that can show what works best?

Make Sure You Are Ready

Before you start, check:

- Does the person doing the evaluation have time and the right skills?
- Can your organization use the findings to make changes?
- Do you have a clear goal for the evaluation and have you shared it?
- Have you told everyone how you'll use what you learn?
- If pressed for time, can you use existing data to help?
- Always keep privacy and respect for participants in mind.

Build the Right Evaluation Plan

- Decide what you want to achieve and who you're focusing on (participants, parents, or staff).
- Pick the best way to get feedback, such as surveys before and after the program, and watching and taking notes during activities.
- Only measure what matters most—don't try to track everything.
- Have a plan for how you'll use every piece of information you collect.
- Create and offer accessible and inclusive evaluation methods and formats such as clear documents, large print, or audio/video formats. for participants with different types of disabilities.
    - Ask persons with disabilities their communication preferences in preparation of the evaluation.
        - See Area of Practice: **Communication** for more tips.

Looking for more ideas? Check out the Government of Canada's **evaluation methods guide** or the **evaluation toolkit**.

Manage Your Data Wisely

- Keep data safe and share it only with staff who need it.
- Make the results easy for everyone to understand and use.
- Think about participants' socio-economic and cultural backgrounds when interpreting the data.
- If you're new, start small with a few simple things to measure.
- For advanced analysis, ask someone with experience and expertise to help.
- Use tools such as Google Forms, Survey Monkey, Excel, SAS, R, OneDrive, or paid survey platforms like RedCap or Qualtrics to organize your data.

Other Resources on Evaluation

- **Community Tool Box** from the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas
- **OCAP**: First Nations principles of ownership, control, access, and possession regarding data collection and use
- **EvaluATE**: Evaluation resource hub
- **SIRC**: Mastering the art of evaluation
- **EVAL Academy**: Supporting the evaluation process

Remember to use the **evaluation toolkit**! Keep in mind that you can always take what you need from the toolkit and leave what you cannot use. You can always return for more information.

Success Stories

Edmonton, Alberta

In Edmonton, Alberta, Heather shared that working directly with persons with disabilities, inclusive program staff, and community partners was key to improving accessibility. Feedback was gathered through online surveys and in-person meetings held in familiar local places. This input was shared across City departments and used to address barriers and increase participation.

Calgary, Alberta

In Calgary, Alberta, Deanne and her team regularly review program guidelines, such as staff-to-participant ratios. When changes are made, they make sure all staff and participants understand them. Deanne also listens closely to participants and families, often through casual conversations, and uses their feedback to strengthen programs.

Shelburne, Nova Scotia

In Shelburne, Nova Scotia, Adam's team secured funding to bring in an accessibility consultant during the improvement of a popular park. The consultant identified what was working well, what could be better, and gave ideas for future changes. The consultant identified current strengths, areas for improvement, and ideas for the future. The team also worked with the local accessibility advisory committee and community members with disabilities through on-site visits. Ongoing dialogue guided design updates to make the park more inclusive.

Fredericton, New Brunswick

At Accessible NB, Wendy's team contacts municipalities and businesses early in the planning of construction or renovation projects. They use their accessibility audit tool and expertise to help design inclusive spaces from the start. This proactive approach prevents issues, saves time and costs, and ensures accessibility is built in rather than added later.

Ottawa, Ontario

In Ottawa, Ontario, Sarah and Rob believe that changing attitudes is a key part of advancing accessibility. They encourage colleagues to question existing assumptions and stay open to new approaches, reminding them that progress—no matter the scale or duration—is worth celebrating. Rob pointed to pilot projects in Ottawa that tested accessibility improvements suggested by residents with disabilities. These trials helped determine practical solutions and kept momentum going on longer-term initiatives. They also make sure accessibility work has its own dedicated focus. Although diversity and inclusion often overlap with accessibility, Sarah stresses that the Accessibility Office runs separately from the municipality's diversity program. This distinction ensures that meeting *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* requirements remains a priority and that accessibility initiatives receive the dedicated support and resources needed to make real change.

Area of Practice: Persuading Decision-Makers

Recreation directors frequently need to get municipal council and senior managers on board with making activities inclusive and accessible for everyone. This usually means asking for funding, spaces, staff, and time to help break down barriers for persons with disabilities. Winning support takes time—you'll need strong communication, lasting relationships, and facts that show the value of inclusion.



Who Makes the Decisions?

Decision-makers often include elected people like the mayor or councillors, as well as managers appointed to run departments. Community groups and local advocates also play an important part in leading change through their influence and teamwork.

How These Strategies Were Developed

These strategies were shaped using a research method that lets organizations adopt existing guidelines exactly as they are, adapt them by making some changes, or develop new recommendations from scratch. All the advice below was adapted from the **Influencing Decision-Makers Toolkit**. The toolkit is based on proven approaches, including Rogers' Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation theory, and resources from the **University of Kansas** and the **University of Alberta**. A consensus panel decided which parts to include based on their professional knowledge, lived experience, and academic expertise. They also helped revise the drafts, making sure that all changes were based on both evidence and the panel's real-life experiences.

Executive Summary

While the tips in this section are specific to persuading council members of a municipal government to support, fund, or invest in the many evidence-based areas of practice as outlined in this Guide, they could also be used in other situations where you are soliciting grants or seeking funding and support from leaders in the community, through charitable giving and grants, local partnerships and corporate sponsorships. These strategies for persuading decision makers are divided into the two groups below:

1. **General Practices:** Here, you will find broad strategies that you can consider when planning to speak or write to your council.
2. **Principles of Persuasion:** This section offers specific persuasive tactics that you can use in varying persuasive contexts, both written and oral.

How-to Strategies

General Practices

- Show decision-makers how the initiative is better than what it replaces, or how conditions improve, and who benefits.
- Explain how the initiative meets the needs and interests of the target audience.
- Describe the proposal clearly and concisely.
- Recommend testing the initiative first, like a pilot or demo site.
- Make sure results are easy to observe and measure.

Principles of Persuasion

- **Make a strong opening.** Start by capturing attention and shaping opinions while the audience is fully engaged.
- **Get to the point.** State your main ideas briefly, then sum things up. Respect your audience's time—they'll appreciate it.
    - See Area of Practice: **Communication** for tips on clarifying audience, initiative, time, and place.
- **Know your facts.** Use existing data and proven research.
    - See Area of Practice: **Evaluation** for more details on program evaluation.
    - Share the **AIMPA** benefits of physical activity.
    - Include statistics on persons with disabilities from **Statistics Canada**.
    - Share how persons with disabilities contribute to the economy using the **Government of Alberta 2022 report**.
    - Collect feedback from persons with disabilities, caregivers, and community members using surveys, letters, calls, and emails. Use these to support the case for more accessible budget allocations. See Area of Practice: **Evaluation** for survey advice.

- Explain how the funding or grant helps the community, its impact, and references municipal, provincial, or federal plans. Show how it supports accessibility acts or strategic plans.

- **Adapt to decision-makers' motivations.** Address their priorities and past decisions. Link inclusion to existing municipal priorities, like diversity or sustainability.
  - If the process matters, explain how you consulted with participants, partners, staff, or board members.
  - Review previous funding/grant winners and municipal strategic plans to tailor your application.
- **Find common ground.** Emphasize shared goals and values. Invite people with firsthand experience to speak and highlight how accessibility helps everyone.
  - Help people see how universal design benefits everyone, for example, caregivers with strollers and delivery workers with carts.
  - For more, see Area of Practice: **Built Environment**
- **Address concerns.** Prepare answers for possible objections.
- **Use a clear call to action.** Be specific about the action requested—what, when, and how.
  - See Areas of Practice: **Communication** and **Partnerships** sections for tips.
- **Offer steps towards action.** If there's hesitation, suggest a smaller first step or a pilot, and ask for clear commitments.
  - Even private commitments—especially in writing—are usually better than no commitments at all.
  - Those making and fulfilling smaller commitments are more likely to make larger commitments later.
- **Bring allies.** Invite respected community members or peers (family member, co-worker, community partner or neighbour) to share their experience. See Area of Practice: **Partnerships** for tips.
- **Repeat the message.** Reinforce key points as needed, since audiences may require multiple reminders before they act.

- **Always thank decision-makers.** Express appreciation even without a commitment. Invite council and management to accessibility or community meetings.
    - Consider a ceremony where leaders sign a commitment to universal design.
- **Follow up.** Check back with decision-makers about the requested action. If you didn't get support, ask for feedback to improve your next proposal.

Example 1: Presenting to Council on Inclusive Recreation Policy

Supporting an inclusive recreation policy helps improve programs and services and can make a stronger case for more funding and resources in the budget.

- Bring local disability data to the council.
- Include staff stories and feedback from participants and caregivers to show real impact.
- Explain who participates, how much support is provided, and how programs feel personal and welcoming.
- Highlight wins, such as more people joining programs.
- Check with other departments if policy changes affect them.
- Align the policy with broader municipal plans on diversity, inclusion, and long-term goals.

Example 2: Rationalizing Cost of One-on-One Support and Professional Staffing

Decision-makers may not fully understand participants' needs without seeing how adaptations work. When explaining the need for more funds, show how it makes budget sense.

- Clarify why dedicating a staff member to a small group or individual is important.
- Emphasize two essentials:
    1. **Staff Training**—Proper training reduces problems and improves outcomes.
    2. **Daily Program Realities**—Describe typical activities and adaptations.

- Ways to justify funding:
    - Benchmark with other cities to show that similar roles exist and that they are funded similarly.
    - Gather staff stories about training needs and positive experiences.
    - Present safety data related to training gaps and show how many local children have disabilities who require services.
    - Highlight additional funding opportunities or grants already pursued.

Success Stories

Aligning Inclusion with Government Priorities

Many participant stories highlight that disability inclusion efforts are more successful when they fit with existing government goals and projects. This includes making sure initiatives line up with multi-year plans, accessibility legislation, or major facility upgrades and new building projects.

Fredericton, New Brunswick

Wendy and the Accessible NB team contact municipalities and businesses as soon as they learn about new construction or renovation projects. Using their audit tools and expertise, they help ensure that buildings are designed to include everyone from the start. This proactive involvement helps prevent problems and saves money by avoiding expensive changes after the fact.

The Role of Accountability

Some municipal staff found that proposals for disability inclusion are more likely to win support from decision-makers when they are linked to the municipality's legal responsibilities—such as those found in provincial, territorial, or national accessibility laws—or when they stress the duty to serve the whole community.

Truro, Nova Scotia

In Truro, Nova Scotia, Shannon explained that support for inclusive recreation grew, as the community saw the success of the sledge hockey program. As more people got involved and recognized its benefits, it became easier to gain backing from city council and local leaders for further inclusion initiatives.

Please contact Active Abilities Canada at info@activeabilities.ca for a list of the references used in this Guide.

Active Abilities Canada