

Equity in the Allocation of Public Recreation Spaces for Those Who Identify as Women or Girls

INTRODUCTION

Equitable access to recreation programs and facilities is fundamental to the wellbeing of all citizens, especially the most vulnerable members of our communities. Those who identify as women or girls, are underrepresented and underserved in all faculties of recreation and sport: participation, leadership, and decision-making. To harness the power of recreation and sport systems for all stakeholder groups, gender inequities regarding access to recreation programs and facilities must be addressed.

Equity for those who identify as women or girls refers to the fair allocation of resources, programs, and decision-making without any discrimination on the basis of gender. It requires addressing any imbalances in available benefits for those who identify as women or girls and ensuring that everyone has access to a variety of opportunities to achieve any social, mental, and physical benefits that result from participating and leading in recreation and sport. It does not necessarily mean making the same programs and facilities available to everyone. In order to achieve equity for those who identify as women or girls, a full range of activities and program choices should be provided to meet their needs. Therefore, some activities may be the same as those offered to other individuals, some may be slightly altered, and some may be altogether different.

Adopting an equity lens also requires an examination of organizational practices and policies that may hinder the participation of those who identify as women or girls. Service providers striving for equity should assess:

- Hiring and recruitment practices – ensure that those who identify as women or girls have leadership roles, are involved in decision-making, and serve as role models;
- Resource allocation – determine potential inequities in budget allocation across programs;
- Facility bookings – ensure that those who identify as women or girls have access to prime-time slots and prime facilities;
- Participation rates – evaluate current programs and services to identify potential barriers;
- Activity programming – assess the types of activities offered for those who identify as women or girls; and
- Promotional materials – ensure language is inclusive and that those who identify as women or girls are represented but not stereotyped in graphics.

Positive initiatives that seek to serve specific groups (e.g., indigenous women and girls, and transgender women and girls) are important because they take into account socialization and historical imbalances, which have subsequently marginalized sectors of the population.

The following document provides a template for municipalities and organizations looking to develop their own equitable access policy with respect to recreation facilities and programming. It is important to remember that equity in the allocation of recreation spaces for those who identify as women or girls cannot be achieved overnight, nor can it be achieved without collaboration and community engagement, particularly from those whom the Equity Policy aims to serve.

Municipalities and organizations should reach out to key stakeholders, and through collaborative meetings, identify and give voice to these under-served groups in need of additional facility time. In an effort to adjust current inequities in facility allocation, municipalities and organizations are encouraged to designate a period of time in which these underserved groups are given priority.

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POLICY TEMPLATE

Municipality/Organization

Department

Date

Policy Statement

“Municipality/Organization is committed to achieving access and equity in its governance, services, and administration. The Department is aligned with the Municipality/Organization’s Access and Equity Policy by developing Equity in the Allocation of Public Recreational Spaces for Those Who Identify as Women or Girls (Equity Policy). Actions will be guided with respect to the principles and practices set out in this policy. The planning and provision of public recreational spaces by the Department will be measured against the values of equity and fairness and will be free from gender discrimination.”

Authority:

The authority for the Equity Policy is gained through Municipality City Council /Organization, The New Brunswick Human Rights Act, and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Section 15 -1). All require that services be provided fairly and without discrimination with respect to gender.

Contextual Definitions

The Equity Policy applies to the Department and Users. The following contextual definitions will provide respective clarification in the application of the Policy.

Barrier –Can be described as any policy or practice that prevents equitable participation due to gender. The term practice here, refers to the actions and behaviours of both collective groups/organizations and individuals.

Department – A group or body which provides recreation facilities/programming or who offers leisure services. May fall under the umbrella of a Municipality/Organization, or may be synonymous with Organization (e.g., YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, Rotary Club, among others).

Equity –The process of allocating resources, programs, and decision making fairly to all Users without any discrimination on the basis of gender and addressing any imbalances in the benefits available to various Users. This requires ensuring that those who identify as women or girls have access to a full range of opportunities to achieve any social, psychological and physical benefits that result from participating and leading in recreation, sport, and physical activity. It does not necessarily mean making the same programs and facilities available to everyone; rather, equity requires that those who identify as girls or women be provided with activity and program choices that reflect their needs, interests and experiences. (Canadian Women & Sport: <https://womenandsport.ca/gender-equity>)

Equity vs. Equality – There is sometimes confusion about the difference between the concepts of equality and equity. In contrast to equity, equality is the process of allocating resources, programs and decisions equally to all genders (e.g., if there was a boys program, there would also be a girls program). While the goal of treating everyone the same may seem noble, the principle of equal treatment tends to ignore the fact that people differ in their capacities, interests, resources and experiences.

Addressing inequity in recreation and sport goes far beyond gender and attempts to alleviate the effects of intersectionality by providing inclusive spaces, resources and opportunities. Every individual has multiple and unique identity factors that affect the way they experience sport, recreation, and physical activity. These could include socio-economic status, citizenship status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and ability, among others. Those who identify as women or girls are especially vulnerable to oppression resulting from intersectionality. (Canadian Women & Sport: <https://womenandsport.ca/gender-equity>)

Intersectionality –Recognizes that every person simultaneously belongs to many identity categories (incl. but not limited to ability, attraction, citizenship, class, creed, ethnicity, gender expression, gender identity, race, religion), and that a person’s experiences with systemic privilege and oppression are impacted by the interplay of these categories. (Egale Canada Human Rights Trust: <https://egale.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Egales-Glossary-of-Terms.pdf>)

Public Recreational Spaces – Any facility or green space that is owned, operated, held by joint venture or offered for lease by the **Municipality/Organization**. These spaces may include but are not limited to parks, sports fields, ice surfaces, pools, trails and community meeting rooms.

Rights – Legislation and policy that details one’s ability to access services and/or programs. According to the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Section 28), rights are guaranteed equally to male and female persons. Furthermore, the *New Brunswick Human Rights Act* (Section 13) declares that “every person is free and equal in dignity and rights without regard to... sexual orientation, sex, gender identity or expression.”

Users – Any permit holder of public recreational spaces, organizations entering into an agreement with the **Municipality/Organization**, leaseholders of public recreational spaces and directly-delivered Departmental programs.

Users with Inequitable Allocations – Refers to any User who is not receiving their equitable share of public recreational spaces and/or times according to this Policy.

Guiding Principles

Guiding principles speak to “the rules of play” or the basic values that the Department and Users will embrace in adhering to the Equity Policy.

Civic Leadership

- Long-term commitment to furthering equity principles in sport and recreation.
- The Equity Policy will be reasonable, practical and achievable.
- It is recognized that gender equity means that residents have choices and voices, and that quantifiable approaches will be taken to include Users who identify as women or girls.

Accountable, Accessible and Equitable Governance

- The Equity Policy will remain consistent with Federal and Provincial legislation and Council’s by-laws.
- The principle of respect will be paramount in all public recreational spaces regardless of gender.
- The Department and Users will embrace a climate of equity in both competitive and non-competitive sport and recreational activities.
- The Department will take a planned approach to the provision of public recreational spaces based on current trends, demographics and gender-specific participation rates (ensuring that those who identify as women or girls are represented).
- Equity will ensure that the allocation of resources will allow participants who identify as women or girls to reach their full potential.

Citizen Expectations

- Every resident has the right to access public recreational spaces.
- Every resident has the right to participate in recreational activities.
- Residents embrace the values of respect, fairness, and trust.
- Barriers to participation for those who identify as women or girls will be addressed

Scope

The Equity Policy applies to the Department and Users.

Policy Deliverables

The Department will continue to plan its service delivery and capital infrastructure program in accordance with Council/Board-approved policies, guidelines, practices and procedures. The Equity Policy requires the Department to include the following in its planning and operational processes:

Pro-active Planning:

The Department will review at a minimum its demographic profile, growth projections, quantify trends and unmet demands as well as identify any inequities with respect to the allocation of public recreation spaces. This information will be shared with Users to assist in their own planning and program development to ensure service gaps continue to be addressed.

Understanding Barriers:

The Department will seek to understand barriers to participation in sport and recreation activities for those who identify as women or girls. This information will assist the Department and Users in planning outreach strategies and related initiatives in order to dismantle limitations to achieving gender equity.

Community Recreation Facility Planning:

The Department will continue with long-term planning for the provision of public recreational spaces and programs. The planning process will continue to recommend public recreation that provides residents with choice, is informed by current trends and best practices, and considers the municipal capital budget processes. Users, especially those who identify as women or girls, will continue to be consulted in the development of these plans and the needs of current Users and potential Users will serve as criteria for all future planning.

Allocation of Public Recreational Spaces:

The Department, through its established **Allocation Policy** and **Allocation Procedures** will establish new criteria for the allocation of public recreation spaces to Users.

The Equity Policy requires identifying and addressing inequities experienced by those who identify as women or girls. These Users are then prioritized and given special consideration during the allocation of public recreational spaces in order to reduce significant barriers to their participation. Positive initiatives that seek to serve these User groups are important because they take into account years of socialization and historical traditions that have created imbalances, subsequently marginalizing sectors of the population.

Allocation procedures related to public recreation spaces permitted through the Department will require Users to adhere to the following criteria, subject to the availability of these spaces:

- All groups who are permit holders must adhere to residency requirements as stated in the Allocation Policy;
- Permitted space must be maximized and appropriate for the activity, age and gender affiliation of participants;
- Equitable distribution of prime versus less desirable time slots will be respected, based on program need;
- Equitable distribution of facilities and facility types will be honoured;
- Gradual approaches to address existing inequities with respect to those who identify as women or girls will be taken.

The Department and Users will establish their own procedures and approaches, which align with the Equity Policy and demonstrate a commitment to its principles and requirements. The Department will ensure that directly delivered programs and services comply with the principles and deliverables of the Equity Policy. Furthermore, the Department will support Users in their development of strategies related to the Equity Policy. Allocation of public recreational spaces will require evidence of compliance to the statements contained herein.

Program Development:

The Department and Users will plan, promote and implement recreation and sport activities, which provide choice and encourage the participation of residents, especially those who identify as women or girls. At a minimum, activities will include:

- Understanding the demographic makeup of the community;
- An equitable approach to programs offered;
- Introduction to recreation and sport programs;
- Support for training and quality assurance approaches.

Welcoming Environments:

The Department and Users will ensure that participants, especially those who identify as women or girls, are provided safe and welcoming environments. Welcoming environments are those that consider the safety and security of participants, employ helpful and encouraging staff and volunteers, and assess the unique needs of all participants.

Safety and security of participants stretches beyond the scheduled time of the activity or program and encompasses preparation time before the activity and afterwards. Those who identify as women or girls, should have a harassment-free safe space to prepare that extinguishes any apprehensions of sexual misconduct.

Designers and facility operators should consider that universal and accessible washrooms and change rooms are increasingly part of evolving best practice considerations. The Canadian Human Rights Act and Criminal Code, express the right of all people to use a washroom or change room that corresponds to their gender identity. Discussions concerning access and how spaces can be made more inclusive should be supported.

Committee Representation:

The Department and Users will work toward having equitable gender representation on all Department-sponsored and Council-supported volunteer Boards and Committees, which utilize public recreational spaces.

Promotion and Communications:

The Department and Users will utilize gender neutral language in its publications, incorporate a balance of genders/representative backgrounds in visual and promotional materials, and seek to promote equity in speakers and presenters. Activities may include but are not limited to:

- Social marketing regarding the benefits of participation;
- Promoting family and peer support;
- A listing of Users in the [Recreation and Leisure Guide](#).

Role Models and Mentors:

The Department and Users will value the importance that role models play in the future gender composition of recreation and sport. The Department will facilitate the following related activities:

- Striving for equitable gender composition of leaders, staff, managers and volunteers;
- Shadowing opportunities;
- Tools and training (e.g., [Introduction to GBA+](#));
- Staff and volunteers in non-traditional roles;
- Consideration in naming of parks, facilities and rooms.

Awareness of Legislation and Pro-active Approaches:

The Department and Users will embrace the principle of equity and be aware of all legislative responsibilities with respect to providing equitable services and activities. Activities will include but are not limited to:

- Training and support to community and sport groups;
- Communicating legislative requirements and supporting practices;
- Sharing anti-harassment policies, and other related policies;
- Distributing information, policies and proactive approaches amongst Users.

Implementation and Compliance

The Department will work with Users to develop implementation plans to support the Equity Policy, monitor compliance and report on its outcomes on an annual basis.

Implementation:

Implementation of this policy will be phased in and completed through the collective efforts of the Department and the Users. Regular meetings will be held with respect to the allocation of public recreational spaces whereby the Equity Policy and implementation strategies/outcomes will become a standing agenda item. An initial meeting will seek to capture the plans of the Department and Users in supporting the Equity Policy within the upcoming season, and a conclusive meeting will summarize progress made throughout the season.

Compliance:

This policy and subsequent updates will be communicated to Users through the Department. Efforts will be made to ensure that all Users who utilize public recreational spaces have a full understanding of any penalties which may result from non-compliance with the Equity Policy and subsequent implementation plans. Non-compliance will be addressed promptly, and efforts will be made to work with the User(s) to rectify the situation. Continued non-compliance with respect to the Equity Policy may result in a revocation of allocated public recreational spaces.

Annual Monitoring and Reporting:

The Department will issue an annual report, which outlines initiatives taken in support of the Equity Policy and the progress made on each of the stated initiatives. The report will include agreed-to performance measures, which will compare progress from year to year. A summary report will be provided to Council, the Users, and to the general public.

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RELEVANT RESOURCES & SAMPLE POLICIES

Canadian Women & Sport, Gender Equity: <https://womenandsport.ca/gender-equity/>

Canadian Women & Sport, Gender Equity LENS: <https://womenandsport.ca/learning-opportunities/e-learning/gender-equity-lens/>

City of Burlington, Gender Equity in the Allocation of Recreation Spaces Policy: https://www.burlington.ca/en/live-and-play/resources/Facilities/Rentals/Gender_Equity_Policy.pdf

City of Coquitlam, Best Practices: Gender Equity Program: https://www.civicinfo.bc.ca/practices_innovations/coquitlam_gender_equity_program_2005.pdf

City of Coquitlam, Gender Equity Policy: <https://www.coquitlam.ca/docs/default-source/recreation-parks-culture-documents/gender-equity-policy.pdf>

City of London, Gender Equity in Recreation Services: <https://www.london.ca/city-hall/city-council/AZ%20Documents/Gender%20Equity%20in%20Recreation%20Services.pdf>

City of Vaughan, Fair Play Facility Allocation Policy: [https://www.vaughan.ca/services/recreation/General%20Documents/Facility%20Rentals/Facility%20Allocation%20Policy%20\(FAP\)%20Brochure.pdf](https://www.vaughan.ca/services/recreation/General%20Documents/Facility%20Rentals/Facility%20Allocation%20Policy%20(FAP)%20Brochure.pdf)

Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, Glossary of Terms: <https://egale.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Egales-Glossary-of-Terms.pdf>

Government of Canada, *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*: <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-15.html>

Government of Canada, Introduction to GBA+: https://cfc-swc.gc.ca/gba-acsc/course-cours/eng/mod00/mod00_01_01.html

Government of New Brunswick, *New Brunswick Human Rights Act*: <http://laws.gnb.ca/en/ShowPdf/cs/2011-c.171.pdf>

Halifax Regional Municipality, HRM Community Access Plan: <https://www.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/about-the-city/regional-community-planning/RegionalCommunityPlanning-CommunityFacilityPlan-HRMCommunityAccessPlan.pdf>

HCMA Architecture + Design, Designing for Inclusivity: https://hcma.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/HCMA_Designing-for-Inclusivity_V1-1.pdf