



MODULE 4

RECREATION LEADERSHIP



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MODULE 4 OUTCOME:

Recreation staff and volunteers recognize their role as community leaders and their potential to positively impact the community through recreation.

MODULE 4 – RECREATION LEADERSHIP

4.1 Introduction

4.2 The Leader as a Community Role Model

4.3 Effective Community Recreation Leaders

4.4 Self-Care

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Recognize the primary role of a recreation leader as a community leader and describe the implications.
- Identify the competencies of an effective community recreation leader.
- Recognize the importance of self-care and the resources available to support oneself in a work environment.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the past, leadership was viewed as a formal position of authority that dealt with supervising and managing. In recreation settings, this typically meant leaders were responsible for providing programs or managing public facilities. Today, recreation leadership is more about facilitating and supporting the energy and talent of other people who wish to make a difference within their community. When we think about leadership in this way, then each and every recreation volunteer and staff person is a leader. It happens at all levels—with or without an official title or formal position of authority.

In many ways, leadership is an inside out job. As a result, it requires knowing your own strengths and abilities. This begins with understanding your preferred learning styles (e.g. seeing, hearing or doing); recognizing whether you are more apt to be a left-brained, analytical or right-brained, holistic thinker; or gaining a better understanding through personality tests of who you are and why you do things the way you do.

RESOURCES FOR EXPLORING PERSONAL LEADERSHIP

- preferred learning styles ([url24](#))
- left-brained or right-brained thinking ([url25](#))
- monochronic (focus on one thing at a time) or polychronic (multi-tasker) ([url26](#))
- personality test (Myers-Briggs) ([url27](#))

4.2 THE LEADER AS A COMMUNITY ROLE MODEL

Recreation leaders are role models in their communities. Being a role model requires leadership from those in formal positions of authority as well as those who may never have thought of themselves as leaders. Being a leader is about your commitment and involvement in the positive changes that make your community a better place to live, work, and play.

A free self-assessment tool called *Understanding Yourself as a Community Leader* ([pdf18](#)) provides more background about six advanced competencies for effective community leadership. These proficiencies build on the foundational competencies identified in the *Competencies for Community Recreation Leaders* ([pdf19](#)) model. Use the tool to help you understand your own strengths as a leader and areas for improvement.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY LEADERS

1. Serve as an agent of change
2. Demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement
3. Apply big picture thinking
4. Are a catalyst for citizen responsibility
5. Advocate for quality of life
6. Apply community development planning and practices

Modeling Integrity and Ethical Behavior

Being in a role where you are viewed as a community leader requires trust which develops over time and is influenced every day by what you say and do.

In small communities, recreation leaders are visible even when they are not working or volunteering. The behaviours and actions of these role models must be ethical and based on a solid foundation of beliefs and values. Some of the values that are important include honesty, integrity, respect and accountability.

Ethical behavior is about demonstrating integrity, which is similar to honesty. Integrity however, is more about walking the talk and lining up personal values and beliefs with what one says and does. Since a person's reputation and the trust of the community are built upon integrity, a leader's behaviours and actions must be consistent with their values.

If the trust is broken, they may no longer be seen as a role model or leader. The community considers something they have said or done as unethical, immoral, or lacking integrity.

In small communities, while it takes time to build trust, it can be broken in an instant. As a recreation leader, consider how what you say or do could be perceived by local residents. Be a role model in your community.

A SUCCESS STORY IN TAGISH (aud6)



Ursula Angerer

4.3 EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY RECREATION LEADERS

Recreation is more than delivering a program or managing a facility. As described in *Module 1 - Recreation Foundations (mod1)*, it is a vehicle to help communities work creatively together to improve quality of life and protect the environment. It can strengthen families, support healthy active lifestyles and ensure safer communities. If our goal as a recreation leader is to maximize the delivery of these outcomes, then attention needs to be given to how programs, services or events are executed.

The most effective recreation leaders ensure that programs, events and facilities build a sense of community and serve the greater public good by empowering citizens. How we do this is by engaging residents to collaborate in the delivery of interactive and innovative programs, events, services and facilities.

This kind of leadership is based on a community development approach where leaders need to be enablers, encouragers, activators, linkers and catalysts in order to tap the strengths and resources of individual citizens, organizations and businesses.

Why is a community development approach important in recreation?

Society's problems are increasingly complex and, regardless of the proficiency of recreation staff and volunteers, one person will never have all the answers. Leaders do not have to be experts. Instead, they can engage those in their communities who are ready and willing to get involved in creating a better place to live, work and play. In many ways, the role of the recreation leader is more about designing a process that will help people help themselves.

Citizens are recreation leaders when they recognize and meet community needs, encourage interdisciplinary approaches, and initiate programs, events, services and facilities. Together, community recreation leaders can maximize the power and potential of the personal, social, environmental and economic benefits of recreation.



Characteristics of a Community Recreation Leader

Being a community leader requires a community development approach. Leaders work with individuals or groups and assist them to identify and apply realistic and meaningful goals. In other words, it's not about telling people what to do or following a personal agenda. Instead, this approach provides a process to help communities help themselves by determining their own priorities and goals.

A community leader should emphasize the priorities of participants over their own, particularly when the goals serve the public good. Community leaders will know their work has been effective when their presence is no longer required. In other words, when participants have been empowered to achieve their goals and have developed the necessary skills to carry on without an overseer. However, recreation leaders are always needed because there will always be other participants and groups with new goals and challenges.



In the past, recreation leaders have focused on the tasks necessary to achieve their own organization's goals. Today, the main responsibility is to help individuals or groups learn and grow. Although participants may initially depend on the community leader, the ultimate goal is to help them become independent, obtaining more responsibility and decision making power. A good leader does not develop followers; they grow other leaders. This is known as empowerment.

Empowerment can be understood as the opposite of being dominated by others. It occurs when people realize they can solve their own problems, build on and strengthen their assets, and have the right to disagree with situations that they perceive as unfair or inappropriate.

Helping empower individuals involves skills such as planning, problem solving, fundraising, conducting meetings, etc. Experienced community leaders may explain that they wear many different hats. The key to success lies in knowing when to shift roles and learning which tools to use. As a leader, it can be difficult to find the right balance between providing support to individuals and groups without creating dependency on the provision of programs and resources.

Roles of Community Recreation Leaders

Generally, community recreation leaders play a variety of different roles helping communities at one or more of the following levels.

1. Supporting individuals,
2. Supporting individuals to work together in groups,
3. Providing general community support,
4. Supporting community initiative, and
5. Encouraging widespread community change (Herchmer, 2013).

Each of these levels is discussed in more detail in relation to the specific roles and responsibilities of a recreation leader.



Supporting individuals:

- Encourage and motivate individuals who have specific issues or interests they want to see addressed.
- Involve people from the community wherever possible to provide feedback and direction, to serve as volunteers, etc.
- Connect individuals to others with similar concerns, issues, and solutions.
- Facilitate or provide opportunities for leadership development and training.
- Connect individuals to resources and community groups that can provide information and referral.

Supporting individuals to work together in groups:

- Promote programs and services offered by community groups.
- Coach the start-up and ongoing development of community groups (e.g. assist with the development of constitutions and bylaws, facilitate strategic planning sessions, help prepare grant applications, etc.).
- Provide resources in the form of administrative assistance, use of meeting facilities and equipment, financial support, etc.
- Become known as an accessible source of information for community groups.
- Maintain active and ongoing communication with groups and individuals.
- Facilitate access to learning resources and opportunities (e.g. board governance, fundraising, social media, etc.).

Providing general community support:

This impacts more than one group.

- Recognize, support and celebrate volunteer involvement.
- Encourage conversations to learn about a community; its strengths as well as any concerns.
- Share knowledge and information.
- Link individuals and groups who have identified needs to resources in the community.
- Promote and/or provide networking opportunities.
- Develop and promote policies articulating a commitment to community development.
- Provide ongoing training and learning opportunities for volunteers and staff.
- Support community-planning initiatives (e.g. master plans, land use planning, community strategic plans, etc.).

Supporting community initiative:

This may affect groups from different areas or sectors.

- Initiate and/or facilitate opportunities for assessing community resources, issues, and challenges.
- Initiate and/or facilitate opportunities for joint problem solving and new initiatives.
- Support opportunities for developing relationships and collaborative initiatives.
- Offer services in partnership.
- Nurture innovation and the development of new ideas.
- Encourage and support efforts among those who may not be adequately served by the community (e.g. newcomers, visible minorities, individuals with disabilities, rural and remote citizens, etc.).

Encouraging widespread community change:

Often referred to as collective impact or comprehensive community transformation, this will always impact groups from different sectors including nonprofits, government and business.

- Help to gather and empower interested citizens and staff for community-based initiatives.
- Build relationships and networks with other sectors (e.g. health, education, justice, social services, businesses, etc.).
- Encourage and support different groups to work together (e.g. recreation collaborating with education).
- Show willingness and flexibility to address the policies, funding models, delivery systems, etc. that limit growth and development.
- Encourage “big picture thinking” and make integration of community services a priority.
- Facilitate access to training and support for leaders from different areas.

4.4 SELF-CARE

If recreation leaders are to be effective in their communities, they need to avoid burnout by caring for themselves as well as their community. Dedicated leaders often place community needs ahead of their own. This type of work takes a lot of energy and can be all consuming, putting leaders at risk of burnout. It is easy

to promote self-care, but not as easy to practice. Experts suggest that it means airing your feelings rather than keeping them bottled up inside; using “I” words to share good things as well as anger and disappointment with someone you trust; and having a social network of friends and family who listen, provide support and are there for you. This can be challenging for recreation leaders who are newcomers to small communities.

Most of us experience stress daily (e.g. getting the kids off to school on time, answering emails on an ongoing basis, meeting deadlines for grant applications, preparing final reports, planning events, hiring new staff, recruiting volunteers, etc.).

Feeling stressed and tired? Take this burnout self-test ([url28](#))

Another kind of stress builds up over time without notice and leads to burnout. A throbbing head, clenched jaw, tight shoulders and/or a racing heart means that stress has caught up with you. Self-care strategies to counteract this include regular physical activity, healthy eating, paying attention to our spiritual lives, taking the time to slow down and relax, and spending time outdoors in nature. Check in with yourself weekly, look at your schedule and determine if it is manageable. Can a few tasks be delegated to someone else? Can a project be moved to a later date?

Self-care is also about being comfortable with saying “no”. Watch this video ([vid3](#)) to learn how to say “no” respectfully with clarity and courage.

Many demands are placed on recreation leaders in small communities, and more often than not, they work hard to accommodate everyone’s needs except their own. Developing a realistic work plan and setting boundaries helps to reduce fatigue over time. There are times when you will have to decline someone’s suggestion or request, and there are effective ways to respond such as, “I really like your idea. We don’t have enough resources at this time to look into it, but I’d like to write it down and revisit your suggestion at the spring meeting.” Or, “Thanks for your ideas. Would you be able to write down a timeline for this and include resources required, number of volunteers and costs? We don’t have enough staff to do this ourselves, but perhaps if you’re willing to lead this event, we might be able to assist.”

Recreation leaders need to remember that they are in the business of recreation. It is important that leaders take time to play, relax and laugh. As role models for recreation and leisure, we need to demonstrate that participation and balance can positively impact individuals and the quality of life in our communities.



SELF CARE RESOURCES

- Yukon Government *Pathways to Wellness* ([url29](#))
- *Community Recreation Handbook for Northern Saskatchewan* ([pdf12-4](#))
- *Self Care Toolkit* ([pdf12-5](#))
- Manitoba *Recreation Director's Handbook* ([pdf11-5](#))